Fall 2003

Reading the personal: Toward a theory and practice of self -narrative in student writing

Megan Fulwiler
University of New Hampshire, Durham

READING THE PERSONAL:

TOWARD A THEORY AND PRACTICE OF SELF NARRATIVE

IN STUDENT WRITING

BY

MEGAN FULWILER

BA, University of Vermont, 1994

MA, University of Vermont, 1998

DISSERTATION

Submitted to the University of New Hampshire

in Partial Fulfillment of

the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

English

September, 2003

ProQuest Information and Learning Company
300 North Zeeb Road
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346

This dissertation has been examined and approved.

Dissertation Director, Thomas Newkirk, Professor of English

John Ernest, Professor of English

Paul Matsuda, Professor of English

Sarah Sherman, Professor of English

Paula Salvio, Professor of Education

7/30/03

To the ordinary man.

To a common hero, an ubiquitous character, walking in countless thousands on the streets. In invoking here at the outset of my narratives the absent figure who provides both their beginning and their necessity, I inquire into the desire whose impossible object he represents.

--Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*

Perhaps the single most universal thing about human experience is the phenomenon of "Self," and we know that education is crucial to its formation. Education should be conducted with that fact in mind.

--Jerome Bruner, *The Culture of Education*

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you to the University of New Hampshire for granting me a dissertation fellowship for the year 2002-2003 which made the completion of this project possible.

Thank you to my dissertation director, Tom Newkirk, for his unflagging support and encouragement. Thank you to my committee John Ernest, Sarah Sherman, Paul Matsuda, and Paula Salvio for asking me all the right questions, especially the ones I couldn't answer. My conversations with you have brought this work to life.

Thank you to Lad Tobin for supplying me with nine years worth of *Fresh Ink* and the inspiration to pursue this work.

Thank you to my family for putting a roof over my head, food on the table, and for always believing in me. Your laughter and love are the best sustenance I know.

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This dissertation examines students' personal essays as rhetorical projects of self-representation. The debate over the role of personal writing in composition studies has created a binary opposition between a modernist transcendent notion of self and a postmodern discursive subject. As a result, the complex issues of self and representation in student work is often dismissed in favor of what is traditionally called "academic discourse." The concept of "narrative identity" provides a way to identify the strategies that student writers use to establish *ethos*, assert agency, and negotiate codes of belonging within multiple social communities. Chapter 1, "Situating Personal Writing," considers how the key terms of self narrative—self, experience, and voice—have become problematic in light of postmodern theories of the subject. Chapter 2, "Identity in Autobiographical Writing: A Question of *Ethos*," examines how autobiographical theory, cultural studies, and rhetorical theory offer important insights into the question of the personal. Chapter 3, "'Poets of their own affairs': (Re)figuring Identity and Agency," draws on the work of French cultural

critic Michel de Certeau in order to study how writers write out of, and back to, existing models of gendered identity. Chapter 4, "'On Lies, Secrets, and Silence': Reading/Writing the Family," reconsiders the role of family essays as relational narratives that define the self in relation to an "other." Chapter 5, "Writing Home: Identity, Place, and Rhetorics of Belonging," looks at how student writers write about a self in relation to home and community. Chapter 6, "The Role of Self Narrative in Education," places the debate over personal writing within the larger context of education and argues that personal essays can do critical work by providing the necessary space for students to imagine themselves as writers and to compose a relationship between their lives and their education.

INTRODUCTION

My high school English teacher once told me that I could never be a writer because I hadn't "suffered enough." Of course, on one level she was joking. However, on another level I don't think she was. In the eyes of my teacher, a seventeen-year old just didn't have enough life experience to write from or about. I remember resigning myself to a fate that would have to involve a lot of nameless suffering in order to become the writer I wanted to be. The idea of the writer—for both my teacher and myself--conjured up the image of a solitary artist hunched over a manuscript in a chilly garret. I bring up my high school English teacher not to condemn her, but because I believe that this view of student writing continues to inform many of our assumptions about teaching composition.

Implicit in my teacher's offhand remark are deeply held cultural myths among English teachers about what counts as good writing and what makes a good writer. Personal narratives of high school and college writers are often dismissed as trite, predictable, or even worse—boring. This raises questions about how writing teachers read and what they read for, as well as how students write and what they write about. Many of my first-year college writers arrive in my classroom with a negative attitude towards writing. Their idea of an essay is often limited to the formulaic five-paragraph theme and they are quick to draw a representative funnel diagram on the board to illustrate it. When I ask my students what makes for a good essay they invariably say "logic," "organization," and "clear thesis statements." A significant number of them have been taught as a rule never to write in the first person. In other words, they seem to

have been trained to do what might be called "academic writing," but not to consider their own lives and experiences as valid material. However, as a teacher, I find that assigning, reading, and evaluating personal writing assignments continues to be the most challenging aspect of my work. Students have important subjects to write about—family, loss, belonging, personal passions—and they often do so with an energy and commitment their "academic" writing lacks.

The work of Tom Newkirk in *The Performance of Self in Student Writing* has made a strong case for a re-evaluation of students' personal essays. Looking at essays that many writing teachers dismiss as trite, clichéd, or sentimental, Newkirk asks instead "What change in stance is required to read this as a good piece of writing?" (32). He argues that writing teachers need to consider how biases and taste dismiss—and therefore miss—what students are doing in personal essays. While Newkirk's call for a reconsideration of the aesthetics that academe judges worthy and the importance of "reading against the grain," I want to suggest we might look more carefully at the rigor required to compose a personal essay. As Wendy Bishop argues in a recent issue of *College English*, "[w]e don't have to go very far to believe—to find the potential in student writing that is there, as yet unactivated—if we rethink our attitudes, expecting to find the familiar profound, traveling farther that we can currently see, reading and writing against the grain, imagining student writing into its actual significance" (268).

In "On the Possibilities of the Essay: A Meditation," Rebecca Blevins Faery looks at the genre of the essay as "performance of reading" (248). Writers of the essay become savvy readers—of themselves and their subjects, as well as the discrepancies that exist between the two. As a form, the essay "negotiates the split between public

discourse...and private utterance" and becomes a "place for expressing the strains, differences, rejections as well as connections experienced by those who feel or have felt particularly marginalized by the discourses which have composed the social text" (249). I have chosen the personal essays written by undergraduate students because I see them as important documents for understanding both their reading of, and resistance to, culturally available models of identity.

In "Images of Student Writing: The Deep Structure of Teacher Response," Louise Wetherbee Phelps outlines the four models for reading student essays available in composition studies. An "evaluative mode" of reading approaches student texts as "closed" in order to assign a grade. A "formative approach" reads student texts as a text in-process and includes the reading of multiple drafts. A "developmental approach" is holistic and considers an entire body of texts, most often an entire portfolio of writing. The final model Phelps calls the "contextual approach":

> The teacher must 'read' a text—however it appears bounded, temporally or spatially—as embedded in and interpenetrating any other discourses. That is, she or he must read a situation as fully as possible, attending to the issues of authorship, the permeability of the students' writing to its context, the embedded mixture of languages that the student is struggling to control. Among the extensions of "text" in this perspective are the teacher's assignments ...commentary on drafts or remarks made in conference or workshop, the sources that a text incorporates through quotation or paraphrase, and a host of other more indirect contributions to authorial language and meaning. (49-55)

My reading of student essays published in Boston College's *Fresh Ink* draws on this fourth model of reading in that I read students' self narratives as complex rhetorical projects that negotiate multiple discourses, communities, and identities. And yet, my reading also complicates this taxonomy because I do not have access to drafts, conference notes, or even teacher assignments.

Chapter 1, "Situating Personal Writing," provides a brief historical overview of the debate over personal writing in composition studies and examines how the key terms of self narrative—self, experience, and voice—have become problematic in light of postmodern theories of the subject. The dismissal of personal writing as a result has only raised the stakes, however, while avoiding the problem.

Chapter 2, "Identity in Autobiographical Writing: A Question of *Ethos*," examines how autobiographical theory, cultural studies, and rhetorical theory offer important insights into the question of the personal. Ultimately, I consider how current thinking on the classical concept of *ethos* may offer composition studies a more precise way to examine the textual presentation of self.

The next three chapters examine student essays for their "experience of being an "I" (Eakin) and for the rhetorical strategies they use to present a "certain kind of person." Chapter 3, "'Poets of their own affairs': (Re)figuring Identity and Agency," examines the ways in which student writers navigate available gender roles. Drawing on the work of French cultural critic Michel de Certeau and other cultural studies theorists, this chapter looks at the ways that writers write out of, and back to, existing models of identity available in American culture.

Chapter 4, "'On Lies, Secrets, and Silence': Reading/Writing the Family," reconsiders the role of family essays as relational narratives. While there is often a strong degree of relationality in any autobiographical writing, Paul John Eakin defines relational narratives as ones where the decisive impact on the author is either a family or an important individual (69). Student essays about family examine how the self is defined in relation to, and with, an "other."

Chapter 5, "Writing Home: Identity, Place, and Rhetorics of Belonging," looks at the ways in which student writers write about a sense of self in relation to home and community. Student writers exist in the "in between" space between home and school, between adolescence and adulthood. The work of Homi K. Bhabha provides a theoretical frame for discussing the experience of liminality in terms of place and identity.

Chapter 6, "The Role of Self Narrative in Education," places the debate over personal writing within the larger context of education and argues that personal essays do critical work that often goes unacknowledged. Personal essays can create what Jerome Bruner calls "cultural mutuality" by creating a space for reflection, relationship, and revision that traditional academic discourse often neglects.

CHAPTER I

SITUATING PERSONAL WRITING

Fieldwork devoted to the nature of subjectivity is obviously a tricky business, but I think it is worth the risk.

---Paul John Eakin, *How Our Lives Become Stories: Making Selves*

College composition courses often begin with a personal experience writing assignment. For new college students in a foreign environment, this can be an opportunity to write about something familiar and known. For teachers, it can be an important way to get to know their students and for students to get to know each other. As a graduate teaching fellow at the University of Vermont, and later at the University of New Hampshire, I have found that personal writing often surprises my students' expectations about how writing can be and what writing can do. They expect lectures and five paragraph themes, but by writing about their personal experience, they see themselves as writers, realize that they can draw on their own life, and begin to see writing as more than a memorized formula.

In the past two decades however, there has been strong opposition to personal writing as a pedagogical cornerstone in composition. Critics argue that personal writing celebrates a modernist notion of a unified "self" disconnected from questions of language, power, and politics. Other critics suggest that personal writing encourages a view of the individual as a rational autonomous being who can achieve insight into both the question of self and the nature of experience. Still other critics argue that personal writing is not rigorous work and fails to teach the necessary skills of academic literacy such as critical thinking, analysis, or argumentation. So while many teachers begin with

a personal writing assignment, it is usually seen as the "easier" warm-up writing to the "real" work of the course—academic or argumentative writing.

As a teacher of writing I have become increasingly uncomfortable with this divide between the teaching of personal writing and the critiques of personal writing. While the critiques of personal writing have raised necessary questions about the nature of the self, I find that students delve deeply into their lives and produce essays that, for the most part, are thought provoking and powerful. When we relegate students' personal writing to the "merely" personal, we miss an important and powerful opportunity to invite novice writers into the world of words. The demands and skills of academic writing are important, but often an unnecessarily sharp divide separates the writing that matters to the academy and the writing that matters to our students. This dissertation examines a middle ground between what has come to seem an unnecessarily polarized debate between the critics of personal writing that problematize the self and the advocates of personal writing who see it as a powerful genre for student writers.

The term personal writing is a problematic term because it covers such a wide range of practices. Recently, Anne Ruggles Gere has defined personal writing as "prose that gives significant attention to the writer's experience and feelings" (204). Personal writing then can include the informal practices that range from freewriting and keeping journals, to writing letters to friends and family. However, it can also include the more formal writing assignments students are assigned in first-year writing classrooms such as personal essay, personal-experience essays, and personal narratives. It is within this latter category of more formal personal writing that this dissertation will focus.

What is called "the personal essay" has a long tradition that begins with Michel Montaigne's *Essais* written from 1572 until his death in 1592 (Lopate 43). The tradition continues with the present day writing of Annie Dillard, Scott Russell Sanders, Joan Didion, and many others. Hallmarks of the personal essay, according to Phillip Lopate, include an "unashamed subjectivity" and a writer who attempts to "surround a something—a subject, a mood, a problematic irritation—by coming at it from all angles, wheeling and diving like a hawk"(xxxviii). One of the formal techniques in a personal essay is "the movement from individual to universal" (xl). In other words, while a personal essay may include personal experience, such experience is often a vehicle for writers to consider their relationship with the larger world.

Personal narratives, on the other hand, have a different history in literature—particularly American literature—in the form of conversion narratives, captivity narratives, and social-movement narratives. Part of the work of personal narratives has been to tell an individual story while also speaking a larger truth about a community and their values. The personal narrative, as Karen Paley defines it in *I Writing: The Politics and Practice of Teaching First-Person Writing,* "takes the writer's own experience as its focus. It involves the use of a narrational *I* that seems to be the actual voice of the person who writes" (13). For the purposes of this dissertation I use the term *narrative* to designate the act of telling or writing in order to make meaning of one's life. I use the term *personal essay* to describe the genre and form that students' personal narratives most often take.

While both personal essays and personal narratives involve the self, the focus of the personal narrative remains the lived experience of the writer. Personal narratives are

deliberately autobiographical and in fact, this would be a better term than "personal writing" because it gets at the question of self-representation in a more precise manner. Autobiographical writing, as feminist critics Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson define it is "a historically situated practice of self-representation" (14). This definition—which Smith and Watson reserve for literary texts—is perhaps a better term to use for the personal narratives that many students write in composition courses. It is these formal acts of written self-representation by students that have perhaps caused the greatest concern in composition studies, and it is this concern that interests me here. In other words, it is not the use of personal anecdotes in an essay focused on something outside the writer, but the student's attempt to represent him or herself directly on paper that is the focus of this study.

Personal writing is most often linked with proponents of the process movement of the 1960s and 70s such as Ken Macrorie, Donald Murray, and Peter Elbow. In response to the "current traditional" model of teaching writing that had held dominant sway throughout much of the 20th century, the process movement emphasized the connection between the writer and the written text. They viewed students as writers, looked at writing as a process rather than just a finished product, and believed that good writing was not just talent but indeed teachable. As a pedagogical practice, the process movement put the writer and his or her interests at the very center of writing. These early writers came to be known as the founding fathers of the writing process movement and later came under attack for their notion that student writers—or any writer—had "authentic voices."

The process movement focused on the writer's "voice" as a way to challenge what Macrorie calls the "author evacuated prose" so long taught in school writing classes. In *Telling Writing*, for example, the key ideas for Macrorie are "honest voice" and telling "some kind of truth" (95). Like James Moffett who stresses the importance of teaching writing in context, as "somebody-talking-to-somebody-else-about-something" (5), Macrorie wants students to tell truths that "count" for them rather than merely regurgitating their perception of the "official language" (3). Macrorie's use of voice, then, stems from his condemnation of a writing pedagogy that doesn't view the student as possessing significant knowledge. Rather than teaching writing as a disembodied, objective exercise, the emphasis on voice made a case for valuing the writer in the writing.

While the process movement brought the question of the writer to the forefront, a later generation of theorists examined the multiple factors that composed the identity of the writer. This interest in the personal was a direct response to traditional positivist notions of the universal subject and feminist and postcolonial theorists such as Elizabeth Flynn, Susan Miller, Susan Jarratt, and Min Zhan Lu sought to deconstruct this bodiless subject in order to highlight the ways in which identity is figured (and refigured) by gender, class, race, sexual orientation, and national belonging.

Since the 1980s, the early process movement's emphasis on voice and personal experience has been thoroughly critiqued. In particular, the terms "authentic voice" and the "self" became contested territory as critics argued that both the personal and experience were shaped, indeed made possible, by language and discourse conventions. The process movement's focus on the individual and on "voice," in other words,

privileged a certain view of the subject steeped in modernist notions of the rational and knowable self—a view that postmodern theories of the subject were quickly deconstructing. By the 1990s, these critiques dramatically altered the landscape of the personal and problematized the notions of self, experience, and voice.

For example, personal writing has been critiqued by social constructivist scholars such as David Bartholomae for not acknowledging the ways that language itself makes possible certain subject positions. In "Inventing the University" (1985), Bartholomae argues that personal writing does not acknowledge the ways in which students are socially constructed by myriad cultural and historical discourses. "A writer does not write," claims Bartholomae, "but is, himself, written by the languages available to him" (465). Personal writing, therefore, reinforces the false ideas (and ideals) of the autonomous individual writer by encouraging students to write about personal experiences. Composition, according to Bartholomae, "should be part of the general critique of traditional humanism" (50). Bartholomae dismisses personal writing as a viable assignment in first year writing classes in favor of academic discourse that actively examines and critiques the production of both writers and texts.

In *Fragments of Rationality: Postmodernity and The Subject of Composition* (1992), Lester Faigley critiques personal writing for assuming that students have a "true" self that can be identified and written. Citing the anthology of student writing by William Coles and James Vopat, *What Makes Writing Good*, Faigley points out that the dominant criteria used by the teachers in the collection to determine "good writing" are the terms "honesty," "authentic voice," and "integrity" (121). The underlying assumption about "good writing," according to Faigley's reading, is that "individuals possess an

identifiable "true" self and that the true self can be expressed in discourse" (122). As Faigley argues "The student selves we encounter in *What Makes Writing Good* are predominately selves that achieve rationality and unity by characterizing former selves as objects for analysis" (129).

Drawing on Foucault's analysis of disciplinary technologies, Faigley argues that the entire project of autobiographical writing—from the assignment, to the student text, to the teacher response—exists within a power dynamic. Faigley's critique is two fold. On one level, he argues, like Bartholomae, that personal writing supports an idea of the autonomous self that is knowable through language. On another level, he argues that personal writing exists within a power dynamic that includes the institutional structure of the university, as well as the tacit notions of "taste" that shape teachers' response to personal essays.

In addition, some of the sharpest critiques of personal writing are distinctly political. Theorists such as James Berlin and Alan France, for example, raise questions about the political efficacy of personal writing in achieving social change. In "Rhetoric and Ideology in the Writing Class" (1988), Berlin critiques expressivist rhetoric for its emphasis on the individual. In other words, writing about the "self" does not lead to increased political awareness, but ultimately supports existing inequitable social conditions. In "Assigning Places: The Function of Introductory Composition as a Cultural Discourse" (1993), France advocates including a Marxist or cultural materialist reading in composition studies. According to France, only two rhetorical positions are provided for students in writing classes—the "dominant self-expressivism" and "social constructionism." Current composition practice only prepares students for their lives as

"producers and consumers of commodities" (593) rather than providing a theoretical critique of capitalism. France agues that even the critical theories of textuality advanced by Bartholomae and Petrosky in their popular reader, *Ways of Reading* (1987), have merely replaced the privatized composing self with a "neutralized 'reading self'" (594). France criticizes both personal writing and social construction for political neutrality.

In sum, the critiques against personal writing from scholars such as Faigley, Bartholomae, Berlin, and France (among many others), argue that personal writing supports the celebration of an "authentic voice," maintains a liberal humanist ideology of a unified, knowable self, and reinforces a capitalist hierarchy. If, in fact, students' personal writing celebrates a self that is cohesive, autonomous, and disengaged from social and political questions, it may work against other important lessons in the undergraduate curriculum that attempt to introduce students to a larger social and political world. If personal writing encourages self-centered thinking, its role in first year writing classes may be counterproductive.

Each of these critics would reduce the role of personal writing assignments in composition courses. However, rather than grappling with the complex issues of self, representation and writing, these critics ultimately turn away from them. Bartholomae's interest in students' rhetorical authority, for instance, seems confined to "academic discourse." Faigley looks to the exciting future that networked classrooms and "hypertext" seems to promise and asks "what might happen if we were to disrupt standard classroom practice and introduce new forms of written discourse? (165). France suggests that students be assigned to practice materialist readings in order that they can "assume a position critical of their culture's fondest truths" (606). While students'

academic writing is important and hypertext is certainly a significant area for further research, to dismiss personal writing altogether avoids a deeper examination of why so many instructors and students find value in personal writing assignments. Rather than dismiss personal writing because of the discursive nature of self and experience, perhaps the genre of personal writing is precisely where further inquiry and theoretical thinking should begin.

By dismissing personal writing altogether, composition theorists end up subscribing to postmodern notions of the subject far removed from the material and ethical reality of lived experiences. The current critiques of personal writing don't offer us much in the way of talking about either the texts or the lived experiences of the very physical beings of the students who sit in our classrooms. They don't, for instance, provide me with ways of thinking and working with Sarah who works two jobs to put herself through school and writes about her decision to be independent from her large family. Nor do they help me work with Joyce, a nontraditional student and mother of three who wants to explore her faith. And they don't help me work with P.J. who comes from South Boston and writes about life on the streets. In other words, to dismiss personal writing is to sidestep Mary Rose O'Reilly's provocative question, "What if we were to take seriously the possibility that our students have a rich and authoritative inner life and tried to nourish it rather than negate it?" (102).

In dismissing the personal texts of the writer, these critics also dismiss student agency. For Bartholomae, students are "written by" language and culture (465). For Faigley, students passively "confess." And France, who *is* interested in agency, ends up advocating that composition needs to "assign students to effective agency" (608).

Students emerge from these critiques as passively self-disclosing, passively accepting subject positions, and passively being "assigned" agency. What the critics miss is a serious discussion of the ways that many students always already claim rhetorical authority, negotiate the complex power dynamics of communities and institutions, and navigate culture and discourse within their personal narratives. What is missing is a way to account for the lived experiences of students and the complex rhetorical demands of writing about these experiences.

Ultimately, in the dismissal of personal writing there is an embedded assumption that personal writing is easier and less rigorous than what is traditionally called "academic discourse." For example, Bartholomae considers students' rhetorical authority in academic writing, but doesn't consider the rhetorical authority in students' personal writing. The privileging of academic discourse over personal writing re-establishes a binary opposition between the rhetorical and the personal, and between analysis and narrative. Faigley's dismissal of personal writing in favor of other genres of writing suggests that the personal is not a productive arena for investigating a postmodern sensibility. Assumed in France's argument is that personal narratives aren't engaged in critical thinking. Within these critiques, in other words, is an implicit sense that personal writing doesn't do any "real" work in the academic community. I believe the question of the self and the work of the personal essay can best be addressed by working more closely with what our students write and the stories they choose to tell.

The Voice in the Text

There are many different terms for referring to the presence of a self in a written text. The two most widely used in English studies are *voice*and *persona*. Perhaps no term has been more critiqued and challenged in recent years than that of voice, yet it remains a steadfast staple in many texts used in writing classes. But what do we mean by voice? The following explanations of voice are all written by practicing essayists. Philip Lopate refers to voice when he declares one of the hallmarks of the personal essay to be its sense of intimacy: "[t]he writer seems to be speaking directly into your ear, confiding everything from gossip to wisdom" (xxiii). Bill Roorbach defines voice in *Writing Life Stories* as "the magic of a person appearing on the page" which comes as a result of "years of writing practice, of a writer getting so fluent in her medium that the medium itself—in this case words —doesn't get in the way of expression" (97). And Rebecca Rule and Susan Wheeler, authors of *True Stories: Guides for Writing from Your Life*, write that "[s]trong voice in an essay or story is like sex appeal in a person. You know it when you see it, but you probably can't explain it" (178). They go on to write that voice "comes from who you are...Voice, finally, springs from the very center of your spirit" (181-820).

In these texts, and many like them, the authors seek to explain voice as the sense of the person on the page, behind the page, and beyond the page. Implicit in these definitions of voice are the contradictions that have made this term suspect in recent years. For instance, voice both comes from who you "are" but also seems to be developed over time and practice. In other words, it is both "natural," and a skill or strategy that can be developed with practice. Voice is the sound of the words on the page in a reader's

case, but also something that seems to transcend words and move beyond the actual words on the page. The problem with the term voice is that it remains a very nebulous concept, one that is difficult to define and understand. Although none of the preceding definitions of voice invoke the word "authentic," each is clearly linked pedagogically with the writing process work of Ken Macrorie and Peter Elbow.

Peter Elbow, himself, acknowledges the slippery terrain of "voice" and attempts to clarify the many meanings in his essay "About Voice and Writing" where he distinguishes between "literal voice"—the characteristics that emanate from the physical body—and voice as a metaphor. Within the metaphoric use of voice, Elbow lists five meanings of voice that are used to speak about writing: 1) audible voice (the sounds in a text), 2) dramatic voice (the character in a text), 3) recognizable or distinctive voice, 4) voice with authority, and 5) resonant voice (xxiv). "Audible voice" refers to the fact that most people first learn to speak before they learn to read. In this sense, as readers we bring our experience listening to spoken words to a written text—we "project aurally" — in an attempt to "hear" a text. "Dramatic voice" is what is often called the "implied author" and this is the sense that every text has a speaker—in other words, someone is saying something. To use the term "dramatic voice" it to hear a character in the discourse. The third use of voice "recognizable or distinctive voice," suggests that writers develop a style that others can recognize. Just as we might recognize someone from their handwriting or walk, so too with this idea of voice. Elbow is careful here to make a distinction between a style of voice and a "real identity." Recognizing someone does not, therefore, necessarily equate with who they are (xxxi). The last metaphoric use

of voice is "voice with authority," often implied in the phrase "having a voice." In this sense, voice is the sense of confidence and conviction that a writer brings to the page.

The first four uses of metaphoric voice points to important qualities in texts and do so without entering the debate over the relationship between voice and identity. However, the fifth definition of voice, "resonant voice or presence," puts us into what Elbow calls "the swamp"—the ideological debate over the nature of the self. Resonant voice "points to the relationship between discourse and the unconscious." If the relationship is not quite right, we notice a "gap" between the message and the speaker. If, however, we sense that the words have managed to "capture the rich complexity of the unconscious"—as much as words can ever do this—then we, as readers, sense the presence of the writer. As Elbow writes: "Once we see that resonance comes from getting more of ourselves behind the words, we realize that unity or singleness is not the goal. Of course we don't have simple, neatly coherent or unchanging selves" (xxxv). Often we find a text has resonant voice when it resonates with our own experiences, tastes, or interests. Unlike the other four uses of metaphoric voice, resonant voice most clearly suggests a fit between the voice in the text and the writer behind it. As I see it, Elbow seeks a middle road between modernist ideas of a unified self and authentic voice and postmodern theories that posit the self as purely a linguistic construct.

Persona and Presence: The Masks of Self

In the realm of nonfiction, the terms*persona* or *presence* have recently been used in place of voice by some writers. *Persona* is commonly defined as the "I" or the speaker in any "first-person poem or narrative" and derives from the Latin word for mask

((*Bedford Glossary of Critical Terms*). While persona is often used to refer to the voice of the author, "it nonetheless should not be confused with the author, for the persona may not accurately reflect the author's personal opinion, feelings, or perspective on the subject" (278). Phillip Lopate refers to the "essayistic personae" of writers who offer "incomplete shards, one mask or persona after another: the eager, skeptical, amiable, tender, curmudgeonly, antic, somber (xxxv-xxviii). In *The Situation and the Story: The Art of Personal Narrative* Vivian Gornick writes that "to fashion a persona out of one's own undisguised self is no easy thing" (7). This nonfiction persona is, as Gornick explains it, "the narrator that a writer pulls out of his or her own agitated and boring self to organize a piece of experience" (25). In "Naming Nonfiction," Robert Root refers to the "personal presence" which he defines as the "guiding sensibility behind the writing" (253.) In "The Singular First Person," Scott Russell Sanders writes that "[t]he first person is too narrow a gate for the whole writer to squeeze through. What we meet on the page is not the flesh-and-blood author, but a simulacrum, a character who wears the label I" (336). All of these writers then suggest a slippage or a gap between the "I" of the narrative and the "I" who writes the narrative. They also suggest a sharp distinction between the textual "I" and the author.

Within the realm of literary fiction Wayne Booth uses the term "implied author" or "second self" to articulate this difference between the textual "I" and the actual author (71). According to Booth, the terms most often used for speaker of a text—"persona," "mask," and even "narrator"—are inaccurate because they each refer to only one aspect of the implied author (73). The terms don't encompass the wider range of *how* writers work to control readers' beliefs, interests, and sympathies. The implied author, writes

Booth, "chooses, consciously or unconsciously, what we read; we infer him as an ideal, literary, created version of the real man; he is the sum of his own choices" (75). As Booth writes, "In fiction, as soon as we encounter an "I," we are conscious of an experiencing mind whose views of the experience will come between us and the event" (152). In other words, part of the experience of reading fiction is to be aware of the multiple layers of narration that exist between reader, writer, and the implied author. Booth's term "implied author" raises questions about the accuracy and usefulness of the term persona for fiction writing.

In terms of self-presentation in a text, Roger Cherry argues that Booth's concept of the implied author is most useful for clarifying the relationship between *ethos* and persona—two terms that are commonly conflated. While *ethos* is a term that I will investigate more fully in chapter two, its relationship with persona is important to understand. According to Cherry, both *ethos* and persona are commonly used to describe the sense of a person in a text but actually have separate histories and distinct attributes. *Ethos* derives from rhetoric and suggests a set of characteristics that will enhance a writer's credibility with his or her audience. In this sense, *ethos* should be used to refer to the real or historical author of a text. Persona comes from literary history and describes the roles authors create for themselves within their text. As a result, persona is best understood as a term to describe the fictional self created in the text. In order to distinguish between the two terms, Cherry creates an "*ethos*-persona continuum" by placing the historical (real) author on one side and the dramatized narrator on the other side (98). Cherry imagines Booth's concept of the implied author as an "intermediary position" between the *ethos* of the author and the persona of the literary text (96).

The term persona is directly associated with the fictionalizing of a self and Cherry's clarification of the term highlights the problem of using persona to describe the self of autobiographical writing. Perhaps one of the primary problems with persona is the image of the mask that it suggests. A mask is most often used to cover or disguise, and therefore rests on the assumption that at some point the mask can be removed to reveal the hidden (or true) self. Using the term persona to describe the self of autobiographical writing may create more problems than it solves.

The Autobiographical Self

The story of the self in autobiography raises important questions about the interpretive dynamics of written self-presentation. Though literary history has always treated seriously confessions and memoirs such as those by St. Augustine and Rousseau, the term autobiography to describe such life stories was not used until the end of the eighteenth century (Olney 6). However, the second half of the 20th century saw a rising interest in the theory and practice of autobiography. Since then, one of the ongoing concerns has been to *define* autobiography. For instance, French critic Philippe Lejeune defines autobiography as "a retrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his own existence, where the focus is his individual life, in particular the story of his own personality" (cited in Bruner 41). Yet James Olney finds even this broad definition troublesome: "Autobiography, like the life it mirrors, refuses to stay still long enough for the genre critic to fit it out with the necessary rules, laws, contracts, and pacts; it refuses, simply, to be a literary genre like any other" (24-25). Because autobiography, unlike fiction or poetry, suggests a direct correlation between the author and composed

text, the reader enters into what Lejeune calls the "autobiographical pact." Readers implicitly expect an autobiography to be a true account of someone's lived experience and hence the voice in the text to be very close to the voice of the actual writer. Yet this very correlation between the author and the text, the life and the writing poses challenges.

For example, early criticism of autobiography concentrated on the "*bios*" or life of the autobiographer and focused on canonical narratives of famous figures like Benjamin Franklin and John Adams. Language and writing were perceived as a transparent medium through which one could write a life and view experience (Hesford 18). Reflecting a transcendent sense of self, autobiography wasn't seen as an act of constructing or crafting a self, but as merely putting that self down on paper. In particular, autobiography was seen as the genre of great men leading great lives that were, in many ways, above the common concerns of everyday life.

A later generation of critics shifted their attention to the "*auto*" of life writing. Following the lead of George Gusdorf, this critical gaze was grounded in the belief that a unique and knowable self existed (Olney 19). Autobiography—in its representation of a single life—was seen as an art that represented a universal truth about a universal subject. With the rise of American feminist criticism, however, the notion of a universal subject and the traditional paradigms of self-experience were critiqued for neglecting the dynamics of gender, race, and class. The story of the universal subject—what Sidonie Smith refers to as the "master narrative"—assumed a subject that was white, male, and heterosexual (Hesford 19). Women's life writing has become a large area of interest for contemporary feminist theory (see the work of Liz Stanley, Linda Peterson, Martha Watson, among others).

Most recently, late 20th century critics influenced by poststructuralism have turned their critical gaze onto "*graphy,*" and the role that writing plays in representing a life. Rather than thinking of autobiography as emblematic of a universal selfhood, theorists of autobiography such as Paul de Man, Roland Barthes, and Jacques Derrida have posed direct challenges to the very notions of memory, narrative, and the self (Anderson 60). In his essay, "Autobiography As De-facement," de Man claims that "the aspiration of autobiography to move beyond its own text to a knowledge of the self and its world is founded in illusion (cited in Eakin 185-86). Similarly, Barthe's essay "Death of an Author" argues for the removal of the author and the deconstruction of the principle of representation itself (Hesford 19). Where the traditional view of autobiography considered life writing as a simple rendering of past meaningful experiences, poststructuralism posits that the self is purely a linguistic construct. In other words, there is no self that exists outside of language and discourse.

In *Framing Identities: Autobiography and the Politics of Pedagogy*, Wendy Hesford argues that the "image of disappearance" that both de Man and Barthes propose "reifies a dominant white Western male space; although the author has disappeared and may be invisible, it is a privileged and thus superior invisibility" (21). Hesford draws our attention to the how this most recent generation of autobiographical critics—in their claim of the purely discursive self—neglects specific material, historical, and economic conditions of self representation. To claim that either the self is purely a matter of discourse or that the author is dead, is to dismiss the experiences of those who have been so long *absent* in the history of autobiography—women, people of color, and colonized subjects. It is ultimately a return to a kind of self defined by white Western male writers

that ignores and silences different stories, as well as different bodies. As Hesford argues, when studying autobiography we must ask: "Who is authorized to tell the truth? Whose truth is being told and to whom?" (20).

In the traditional literary field of autobiographical studies, as in the more recent field of composition studies, representing the self on paper is a thorny and complex proposition. The debate over personal writing in composition studies, however, has seemingly arrived at a similar place regarding the role that language plays in shaping selves. Focusing exclusively on the discursive nature of selfhood risks neglecting the multiple conditions that make stories of selves possible. The question of personal writing has raised serious considerations of self, experience, and voice that need to be addressed. But if the self is solely a matter of discourse and the idea of experience is reduced to a cultural script, what happens to the lived stories of self? How does one represent the self in a written text?

The Presence of the Personal

At the same time that some recent critical theory has hailed the end of the subject, the death of the author, and the purely discursive nature of selfhood, there has been a veritable explosion of the importance of the personal and the subjective in both popular culture and the academy.

In fact, the late 20th century has become saturated with the self. In both popular culture and the academy, the personal has emerged as a powerful presence. From television shows like *Oprah* and *Jerry Springer* to the proliferation of memoirs and autobiographies on the *New York Times Bestseller* list, the personal is thriving. Rather

than celebrating autonomous individual selves divorced from social or political questions, the personal has become public, and often attests to the contingent and social nature of the self. The question of the personal, then, does not go away, but only seems to get progressively more complex.

For instance, Michael Ondaatje's *Running In The Family* is a multigenre memoir that investigates the layers of truth surrounding his family in Sri Lanka. In his desire to "touch them [his family members] into words," he journeys through time and family legend. Mary Karr's memoir *The Liars' Club* revolves around the missing and fragmented memories of Karr's childhood. Her narrative attempts to piece together the puzzle of her parents' lives in order to more fully understand her own. The fragmented structure of both texts mirrors the partial and provisional nature of truth and self, and implicitly shows the self as part of—as opposed to outside of—a tightly woven fabric of familial, social, and cultural strains.

Recent work in fields such as anthropology, psychiatry, and literature incorporate personal narrative with traditional academic prose in order to rethink the dominance of objective knowledge. For instance, in *The Vulnerable Observer: Anthropology That Breaks Your Heart*, Ruth Behar writes about resisting the "I" of the ethnographic "privileged eye" which presumes to report observations of the Other. Kay Redfield Jamison's *An Unquiet Mind: A Memoir of Moods and Madness,* documents her own struggles with manic-depressive illness as a practicing psychiatrist. In literary studies, Jane Tompkins' *A Life in School: What The Teacher Learned* and Brenda Daly's

Authoring a Life: A Woman's Survival In and Through Literary Studies weave personal narratives together with institutional experiences of education.

The term "autoethnography" has been used to describe autobiographies that highlight lived experience within a social context. For example, Richard Rodriguez's *Hunger of Memory* and Mike Rose's *Lives on the Boundary* are personal narratives that expose the historical elision of ethnicity and class in higher education. Rodriguez emphasizes how important the particularity of individual lived experience is: "But I write of one life only. My own"(7). In a similar manner, Linda Brodkey's autoethnographic literacy narrative "Writing on the Bias," examines the connections between education and class as Brodkey draws on her experience as a reader, writer, and teacher. Writers, Brodkey claims, "write on the bias or not at all" (546). That is, our individual "bias"—our lines of personal and professional inquiry—are determined by our cultural context and social institutions.

In composition studies itself, questions of the personal have impacted qualitative research practices as well as professional scholarship. Ethnographers Deborah Brandt and Ellen Cushman, for instance have considered the effects and problems of self-disclosure in qualitative research. Anne Herrington and Victor Villanueva each reflect on the inclusion of the personal in academic writing. In "When Is My Business Your Business?," Herrington argues that the term "personal" is not a monolithic entity and that "what is personal is at once socially, culturally, and personally defined" (47). In "The Personal," Villanueva renews his stance of the "autobiographical as critique." Within the field of composition, the personal has proved useful in dispelling myths of objectivity and universal experience. At the same time, the professional conversation about the role and

possibility of students' personal writing in composition classes seems to be mired in oppositional thinking—either one writes a personal narrative, celebrating a romantic conception of the autonomous individual, or one is trapped in cultural narratives which render the self a result of written discourse.

Reading Student Writing

The following example of personal student writing may illustrate why I believe it is premature to dismiss personal writing from the first year writing class. In this excerpt from Patricia Burke's personal essay "Embracing a Leper," she describes her experience volunteering at a nursing home as part of a high school religion class. The class requirements were to keep a journal and to commit to forty hours of community service. She opens her essay with her first journal entry:

> Today I began volunteering at a local nursing home. I am looking forward to spending more time with the residents I met. The staff was very nice to me. I played cards with a woman named Rose, she is trying to teach me how to play bridge. Sometimes I feel a little uncomfortable around some of the more elderly residents. I feel that volunteering despite feeling uncomfortable is Christ's call to serve. (45)

Here is Patricia's second paragraph:

> Entry one in my service project journal was as simple and superficial as anything I had ever written. I took up space with facts, threw in a little emotion to make the piece personal and touching, and wrapped it all up with a reference to something religious. It was a neat and effective method, one frequently followed by high school students required to keep journals…I wanted so badly, so terribly badly, to make some sort of difference somewhere. This was clearly my big opportunity, and I looked forward to beginning. Imagine my surprise when I discovered that it didn't feel good, not at all. At first it didn't feel like much, and then it hurt like hell. (45)

By opening with a journal entry that she subsequently dismisses, Patricia signals to her reader that there are two stories here: the story of her disappointed expectations in this experience and, even more importantly, the story of the kind of *self* she wanted to be but wasn't. Scenes of writing frame Patricia's narrative as she weaves in journal entries into her essay about volunteering. Patricia's text raises questions about the genre of the essay, the role of the personal within academic settings, the multiple "I", and the task of self representation itself. In fact, Patricia's text itself raises many of the same concerns about personal writing that critics have—questions about authentic voice, a unified self, the autonomous individual. Postmodern theory has questioned the existence of a rational and coherent "self," as well as the ability to understand or acquire insight into this self. In some ways then, postmodern theory suggests the end of the "self" as we know it, and certainly the dissolution of personal writing as a means of self knowledge and self exploration. However, what do we do with an essay that reveals what one could call a postmodern sensibility? How do we talk about the act of narrative, the story of self, or the conditions of self-representation? How do we talk about our experience as selves grounded in the experiences of everyday life while also acknowledging the ways that language and culture shape us?

This dissertation is an inquiry into the complex rhetorical and narrative demands of written self-representation. It grew out of my experience of reading students' personal essays that did not match up with the critiques most often leveled against them as solipsistic celebrations of the individual. Rather than celebrating an illusionary autonomous and unified self, I began to notice how students wrote about identities that

were deeply in flux and a sense of self tightly bound up and in multiple communities. Rather than being "merely" stories of selves, student essays seemed to be exploring and negotiating an ambiguous space *between* socially defined identities and their own experiences. I began to think that writing teachers needed to pay more—not less—attention to the complex moves that students were making as writers and as readers of their own lives and experiences. The central questions that frame this project are these: How do students configure a sense of self? Do student writers achieve agency and authority in personal essays? And if so, how? In order to address these questions, I have found it useful to consult the fields of autobiography, cultural studies, and rhetoric.

Central to this project is an examination of the notion of "self" and the role that writing plays in creating this sense of self. In order to try and untangle the notion of a self from the representation of the self, I look at current autobiographical theory, in particular Paul John Eakin's concept of "narrative identity," which complicates many of the assumptions about self-representation and calls our attention to the ways in which writing is always an act of construing and constructing. [1]

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[1]While both composition studies and literature take the question of self (re)presentation seriously, neither have considered studets' personal narratives in the same league with published, book length autobiographies. And with good reason. I don't mean to suggest that there is a simple equation between the assigned personal writing of college students and the published autobiographies meant for a larger reading public. For example, the genre of autobiography—which implies a retrospective examination of a life—privileges older writers with substantial life experience; college writers are, for the most part, young adults with considerably less life experience. Published autobiographies are often by public figures who are well known or whose story is considered unusual or of contemporary relevance (for example, the recent memoir written by Lisa Beamer, *Let's Roll*, is about the passengers on flight #93 who resisted the terrorists on 9/11). College writers, on the other hand, are largely novice writers, many of whom are taking a required first-year writing class, most of whom do not consider themselves writers at all

Cultural studies provides a way of conceptualizing a middle ground for composition studies by theorizing both "the personal" and "experience." One of the key moves is to untangle the concept of the personal from the realm of the private and in this regard the work of feminist cultural theorist Elspeth Probyn—whose thinking on both "self" and "experiences" is founded in the writing of Raymond Williams and Stuart Hall—has been particularly influential to my work. While Probyn's concern is with the ways theorists incorporate the autobiographical into cultural theory, I believe her thinking on self representation can provide an important intervention in terms of thinking about students' personal narratives.

In addition, feminist reconsiderations of rhetoric are influential in my thinking about language and representation. I am influenced by the work of Krista Ratcliffe who argues that "the personal, the textual, and the cultural" intersect and need to be defined "not as static artifacts but as rhetorical functions." All three are read "in order to make ideology visible and to locate gaps that disempowered subjects may fill with their heteroglossic words, nonunified voices, and conflictive actions" (13). In particular, I have

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However, autobiographical theory's interest in the interpretive dynamic of written self representation offers composition studies a critical lens for viewing students' personal narratives. I bring autobiographical theory to bear on students' texts because autobiographical theory has what Julia Watson calls a "*bios*-bias" that focuses on canonical lives and canonical texts. Autobiographical theorizing, as Watson writes, has "remained...the genre of exemplary lives" (61). Many current texts on autobiographical theory return to the texts of writers such as Montaigne, Rousseau, Nabokov, Sartre (see for example John Sturrock's *The Language of Autobiography: Studies in the First Person Singular* (1993) and James Olney's *Memory & Narrative: The Weave of Life-Writing* (1998)). Watson is primarily concerned with revising autobiographical theory to include autobiographies by women and minorities (she sites the collection *This Bridge Called My Back* as an example of non-canonical writers and lives that subverts traditional autobiographical study).Watson argues that autobiographical theory needs to expand its horizons to include non-canonical writers and lives. Student writers are an example of non-canonical writers with non-canonical lives.

turned to the recent reexamination of the classical rhetorical term of *ethos*. The work of Susan Jarrett and Nedra Reynolds argues that *ethos* needs to be seen not as a fixed feature of a text, but one that offers a theory of positionality and that acknowledges that "positioning is a constant awareness that one always speaks from a particular place in a social structure" (47).

The classic mantra so often invoked in writing classes to "write what you know" assumes that personal experience is a simple proposition devoid of the rhetorical and narrative demands of other writing tasks. But as Jerome Bruner argues, "[a]utobiography is altogether too familiar a form to be taken at face value. Its very familiarity risks obscuring its secretive metaphysics and its tacit presuppositions, both of which would be the better for some airing" ("The Autobiographical Process" 38). Teachers of writing who assign, read, and evaluate personal narratives would profit from an examination of the "tacit presuppositions" of the autobiographical act. Rather than reading student autobiographical narratives as accounts of a true self or as a social construct, what happens when they are read as rhetorical projects? What might this frame of reading teach us about *how* novice writers create, understand, and negotiate their sense of being an "I"?

To address these questions I have used personal essays written between 1993-2002 in Boston College's first-year writing seminar. Boston College is a Catholic coeducational university with an enrollment of 8,900 undergraduate students. As part of the core curriculum, the first-year writing seminar is designed as a workshop where student writers create a portfolio that includes both personal and academic writing. Each

year 25 exemplary student essays are published in a collection entitled *Fresh Ink.* The contents of each collection are arranged according to rhetorical strategies (such as description, narrative, reflection, argument), as well as topic (*Writing About Personal Experience, Writing About Place, Writing about Popular Culture, Writing about Cross- or Multi-cultural Experience,* and *Writing About Values, Politics, and Beliefs*.) The flexibility of categorizing these essays speaks to the fluidity that exists within them. Of the 225 essays in the nine years of *Fresh Ink*it is difficult to draw rigid lines that separate personal essays from more traditional academic writing. There are, for example, many pieces that incorporate personal experience with literary analysis or investigative research. In many ways, this intricate blending and blurring of generic lines strengthened my interest in the possibilities of the personal essay. However, for the purpose of this dissertation, I have chosen personal essays that focused primarily on the writer's sense of identity. From this focus emerged the three dominant themes that form the following chapters: essays about gendered identity, essays about family members, and essays about home and place.

I chose to work with the *Fresh Ink* essays for two reasons: 1) they exist in the public domain as published examples of the range of possibilities afforded by the personal essay; 2) I wanted to approach student writing as I would literary texts—without the interpersonal relationship, written feedback, and revision suggestions that are part of my own writing classes. The decision to limit my data to *Fresh Ink*, however, also created certain limitations for this study in terms of both texts and writers. For instance, if I had had access to classroom pedagogy, revision suggestions, and subsequent drafts, I would have been able to include a "thick description" of the specific social and pedagogical

contexts within which these essays were written. This kind of metacommentary is exemplified by William Coles and James Vopat's *What Makes Writing Good.* By soliciting examples of "good writing" from writing teachers, the intended goal is to more clearly define and articulate the tacit assumptions that guide the teaching of writing. As a result, their focus is primarily on the teacher commentary that frames each student essay and explains the teacher's rationale for choosing the particular essay.

Had I worked closely with the student writers, I would have been able to hear directly from students their own reflections on writing these essays and the kind of revision work they encountered. This would have provided a richer and more thorough investigation into both how these essays were produced and into what students had to say about the essays they were writing. Close work with student writers is, for example, the foundation for Michelle Payne's recent book *Bodily Discourses: When Students Write About Abuse and Eating Disorders.* Working with 25 student essays, Payne interviews teachers, student writers, and follows two students through their first-year writing class. The result is a close focus study on student essays in context—both within the larger historical context of abuse narratives, as well as within the context of the writing classroom—that also includes student voices and commentary.

Both *What Makes Writing Good* and *Bodily Discourses* are important texts in the field of composition studies in their focus on the question of students' personal writing. However, this dissertation examines students' essays as texts without the supporting apparatus of either teacher rationale or student reflection. In other words, I was interested in what would happen when the same theories of reading that were taught and espoused in English departments were brought to bear on one of the most common writing

assignments in English departments—students' personal essays. The majority of texts encountered within English studies are texts that stand on their own in the sense that readers do not have direct access to the writer or to early drafts. What we read is a text that does work in the world. We seem not to expect or demand the same kind of reading vigor when it comes to student essays.

The fact that student essays are published yearly at a major university suggests that student writing is clearly celebrated and valued within the larger academic institution of Boston College. In this way, my decision to work closely with these published essays supports a best case claim. In other words, I am interested in what is *possible* if students are encouraged to write personal essays, if teachers attend closely to this writing, and if an academic institution supports and validates this work.

CHAPTER II

IDENTITY IN AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL WRITING: A QUESTION OF *ETHOS*

> *If narrative is to be made an instrument of mind on behalf of meaning making, it requires work on our part—reading it, making it, analyzing it, understanding its craft, sensing its uses, discussing it.*
>
> --Jerome Bruner, *The Culture of Education*

The autobiographical self has received a lot of attention in the field of literary studies. Where self presentation was traditionally considered a simple project, we have come to see it as not given or natural, but rhetorical and cultural. Rarely is this same method of reading brought to bear on students' personal essays. I begin by looking at two examples of written self-representation published by well-known authors in order to highlight the complexity involved in narrating a life story. However, what I will argue is that we can read student essays in the same way. While at first glance reading E.B. White and Mary Karr together might seem only to emphasize their differences, I am interested in their similar focus on self-knowledge and self-narrative as well as the different rhetorical tactics each writer uses. I read these excerpts for the kind of self that each one presents and the kind of self that each one questions.

E.B. White's essay, "Once More to the Lake," written in 1941 describes a return visit to the lake where he vacationed as a child. White brings his son for a week of fishing and finds that many things have remained much the same. The result is a meditation on memory and time. Here is the first paragraph:

> One summer, along about 1904, my father rented a camp on a lake in Maine and took us all there for the month of August. We all got

> ringworm from some kittens and had to rub Pond's Extract on our arms and legs night and morning, and my father rolled over in a canoe with all his clothes on; but outside of that the vacation was a success and from then on none of us ever thought there was any place in the world like that lake in Maine. We returned summer after summer—always on August 1 for one month. I have since become a salt-water man, but sometimes in summer there are days when the restlessness of tides and the fearful cold of the sea water and the incessant wind that blows across the afternoon and into the evening make me wish for the placidity of a lake in the woods. A few weeks ago this feeling got so strong I bought myself a couple of bass hooks and a spinner and returned to the lake where we used to go, for a week's fishing and to revisit old haunts. (533)

This is a familiar beginning to a familiar essay, one often used in first-year writing classes. There is a strong suggestion of continuity and a self that projects a degree of certainty about who the author is and what he's come to know—that, for instance he is a "salt-water man." This is a self that is solid and certain, with the comforting knowledge that there are "old haunts" to which he can return.

If E.B. White presents us with a genteel New England gentleman preparing for a fishing trip, Mary Karr presents a self preparing for a vastly different kind of trip in her memoir, *Cherry*. Karr writes about growing up in West Texas during the 1970s and her early encounters with boys, drugs, and poetry. *Cherry* is both about the general angst of adolescence and the particular struggles Karr faced in her unusual family. In sharp contrast to White's self presentation, Karr's is marked by mystery and potential, desperation and determination. Here, for example, is the first paragraph from *Cherry*:

> No road offers more mystery than that first one you mount from the town you were born to, the first time you mount it of your own volition, on a trip funded by your own coffee tin of wrinkled up dollars—bills you've saved and scrounged for, worked the all-night switch-board for, missed the Rolling Stones for, sold fragrant pot with smashed flowers going brown inside twist-tie plastic baggies for. In fact, to disembark from

> your origins, you've done everything you can think to scrounge money save selling your spanking young pussy. (3)

One of the most striking characteristics of Karr's passage is the use of second person in place of the more traditional first person of autobiographical writing. Where White's use of "I" is comfortable and confident, Karr's use of second person seemingly emphasizes the instability of a narrative self who can't claim the "appropriate" pronoun. If the use of second person represents what Paul John Eakin calls "the autobiographer's disidentification with her early self" (96), in Karr's case it also represents a kind of identification with her audience. If the self that she is presenting—scrounging, night-shift working, pot-smoking self—may risk alienating her readers, her use of second person works as a kind of lasso to create an immediate inclusion of the reader. "Here," she is saying, "this is you too." We read White because we feel like we can trust him and the self that he presents us; we read Karr because we don't know if we can, but we're already implicated by the use of second person. We read White because we want to return with him once more to the lake. We read Karr because we're not sure where she's going to take us, but are curious to find out. Yet both narratives are about journeying and returning: one a mythic return to an original homeplace, the other a mythic departure from an original homeplace. In addition, both are narratives *about* self-narrative. And neither ends where the reader anticipated.

By the end of "Once More to the Lake," White's early sense of self-knowledge has been gradually but decidedly disrupted. Throughout the essay, White emphasizes the word "same"—the waves are the same, the boat is the same, and the country girls are the same. White is struck by how little has actually changed since he was a boy and writes, "There had been no years" (535). Only the presence of automobiles and the jarring sound

of outboard motors on the quiet lake disrupt White's illusion. His return trip is so similar to his childhood memories of the place that watching his son causes a sense of disequilibrium. He writes, "I began to sustain the illusion that he was I, and therefore, by simple transposition, that I was my father...I seemed to be living a dual existence" (534). While fishing with his son in the boat, White writes "I felt dizzy and I didn't know which rod I was at the end of" (534). His sense of self has become complicated and blurred, overturning the solidity and certainty of the opening paragraph: "Everywhere we went I had trouble making out which was I, the one walking at my side, the one walking in my pants" (537). What began as an essay about a comfortable, nostalgic return has resulted in a fragmentation of the self and a rupture in the certainty of "I."

In contrast, Karr's *Cherry* opens with the presentation of self that is already fragmented and uncertain. Throughout her narrative, she describes her multiple run-ins with authority from school principals to police chiefs. She flirts with suicide, depression, and drug dealers. In many ways, her story explores the limits of self-fragmentation. However, her memoir ends with the words of her best friend who tells her that "You're your Same Self." Karr reflects:

> The truth of this flickers past you like a spark. For years you've felt only half-done inside, cobbled together by paper clips, held intact by gum wads and school paste. But something solid is starting to assemble inside you. You say, I am my Same Self. That's not nothing, is it? (276)

From chapter to chapter, Karr switches back and forth between first and second person, which underscores the malleability of her sense of self. To end with the pronouncement of being the "Same Self" is an interesting choice because it implies a cohesion and unity that much of her narrative has worked against. While White's identity has proven to be more slippery and multiple than he previously thought, Karr's identity celebrates some

kind of essence of self, some kind of core that is always already present. The word "same" ends up being a crucial concept for both writers, but in slightly different ways. In White's narrative, the Maine surroundings remain the same, but he has changed. In Karr's narrative her West Texas world is tumultuous and chaotic, but she emerges as a "Same self" that is stable and can hold together.

While it is possible to read White's essay as the dissolution of a unified self and Karr's about the gradual shoring up of one, I think this would miss the point. They are both narratives that take as their central concern the nature of self and the role that writing plays in shaping and understanding it. Each narrative balances the desire to know a self with the knowledge that in the act of writing the self is simultaneously created and lost. As soon as one writes "I" there has already been a separation from that "I." In writing the "I" now, it becomes the "I" then. In this regard, writing is always already about loss and about the slippage between self and the representation of that self.

The ongoing debate in composition studies regarding the role of personal writing has neglected the rhetorical and narrative complexity of attending to the ever shifting and slippery "I." The critique of the romantic, solipsistic, and disengaged self suggests a conflation of self and story that current thinking on self-representation dismantles. The brief excerpts by White and Karr show how the autobiographical self is always in process, malleable, mutable, and unfinished. They also emphasize the role that writing plays in shaping this self, as well as the fundamental fact that writing is always insufficient to hold onto the "I." In each of these excerpts, questions of personal identity are nested in concerns of family and place. My point is not that first-year college writers

be expected to write like White or Karr, but that writing teachers bring the same theoretical awareness to students' self narratives that we bring to autobiographical texts. Autobiographical theory has deconstructed the sense of the transcendent self, the transparent narrative, and opened up the subject of self-representation in rich ways. This same critical attention has not been brought to bear on students' autobiographical writing.

The rest of this chapter looks at how autobiographical theory, cultural studies, and rhetorical theory provide theoretical interventions into what have become problematic terms in personal writing—*self*, *experience*, *agency*, and *voice*. Autobiographical theory offers an important way to theorize the connections between narrative and identity that are implicit in written self-representation. Cultural studies provides a way to think through the distinction between lived experience and "articulated" experience. Ultimately, current thinking on the classical concept of *ethos* provides a possible alternative to the terms voice and persona for the textual presentation of a self.

Autobiography and Narrative Identity

Personal writing has been critiqued for celebrating a romantic transcendent self that exists outside of culture and language. The postmodern response has been to theorize a self that exists purely as a product of discourse and language. However, if we borrow the concepts of "narrative identity" and "relational narratives" from autobiographical theory, it allows us to theorize a self that acknowledges the material realties of existence while also recognizing the role that language plays in shaping our understanding of this experience. Individuals are continually involved in everyday acts of

self narration. When we tell stories to friends, family, or colleagues, we simultaneously shape both the story and our sense of self. It is through the telling of stories—about what we did yesterday, where we live, what kind of work we do—that we, in fact, come to understand our selves, our actions, and our values. It is through acts of self narration that we come to know others as well. Narrative, then does not just record or transcribe a story of self, but instead plays a fundamental role in shaping a sense of self.

In *How Our Lives Become Stories*, Paul John Eakin uses the term "narrative identity" to refer to this implicit link between narrative and a sense of self. Narrative as Eakin uses it, is "not merely a literary form but a mode of phenomenological and cognitive self-experience, while self—the self of autobiographical discourse—does not necessarily precede its constitution in narrative" (100). There are two important concepts to sort out here about the nature of narrative and the condition of selfhood. Narrative as Eakin uses it is more than a genre—it encompasses ways of telling and ways of framing stories. In *The Culture of Education*, Jerome Bruner argues that self narration is a defining act of human subjectivity. Stories of self are not just something we tell or write, but are in fact integral and necessary to developing a sense of self that is able to navigate in the world. According to Bruner, "skill in narrative construction and narrative understanding is crucial to constructing our lives and a "place" for ourselves in the possible world we will encounter" (40). Narrative identity highlights the fact that stories indeed provide shape and meaning to lived experiences.

Narrative identity provides a vocabulary for describing White's sense of self. The structure of White's essay is about stories themselves. For instance, the story of White's childhood memories forms the backdrop for the story of his return visit as an adult. The

story of the return visit is then told through the prism of the first story—what is the same and what is different. The layers of story resemble a palimpsest in that each story is also a story about a self. Autobiographical writing is always a temporary stitching together of selves, it is what Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson call a "performative act" (47). A self narrative can never be a transcription or recording of some kind of pre-existing self. It can, however, as in White's case, stand witness to lived experience. Part of what makes White's essay so compelling is the melancholy knowledge of the fleeting nature of selves and the awareness that even in writing the self can not be caught or fully rendered.

If our sense of self is shaped by stories, the stories themselves are shaped by cultural expectations of both selves and stories. As Bruner explains, "narrative acts of self-making are usually guided by unspoken, implicit cultural models of what selfhood should be, might be—and, of course, shouldn't be" (66). In other words, we tell stories about ourselves according to narrative conventions that are familiar to us and that are available in our culture. Our stories act as models for understanding our "self"—in relation to other selves, other stories, and other possible identities. Questions of the self then, are inherently and inextricably bound up with the kinds of selves that a culture understands, validates, and promotes. These kinds of selves are found all around us in movies, novels, television. Karr's presentation of self, for instance, draws on narrative conventions of the coming-of-age narrative that promise progressive evolution and growth. That is, she writes her narrative from the perspective of hindsight and distance.

Narrative identity addresses the fundamental relationship between narrative and selfhood, but narrative can never be a direct representation of either self or experience. In fact, as Nicola King explains in *Memory, Narrative, Identity: Remembering the Self*,

self-narratives have three distinct parts: 1) the event; 2) the memory of the event; and 3) the writing of (the memory of) the event. According to King, it is the third stage of this process—the writing of (the memory of) the event— that is the only version of the first—the event—that we have access to (5-6). To remember the self, King explains, "is not a case of restoring an original identity, but a continuing process of '*re*-membering,' of putting together moment by moment, of provisional and partial reconstruction" (175). In other words, no sense of a self exists prior to the story of the self—it is in the story that the self comes together, is rebuilt, and refigured in different way at different times. The distinction between the event, the memory of the event, and the writing (of the memory) of the event underscores the ways in which memory and interpretation shape and construe meaning. There can be no direct access to self, but there can also be no direct access to some kind of true or authentic experience of self. Our memories are an interpretation, but even more importantly, our acts of *narrating* our memories are interpretive. As Karr reflects back on her younger self—what we are reading is an interpretation of her memories of West Texas. How she remembers, what she remembers, and how she frames both of these is largely shaped by the narrative structure she relies on in the coming-of-age narrative. My point is that while readers may expect to gain some kind of access to Karr, her narrative instability reminds readers of the interpretive dynamics that are already at work. Writing then is an act that is always already twice-removed—it is an interpretation of an interpretation. The architecture of self, experience, and memory are all acts of interpretation of the material world.

One of the confusions in the debate over personal writing and the autobiographical self has been to conflate a self with the desire for *a story of self.* In

Relating Narratives: Storytelling and Selfhood, Adriana Cavarero makes the case that every individual has a "narratable self" (72). She goes on, however, to distinguish between the "who"—the physical and biological entity of the material body that persists in its "insubstitutability" and the "what"—the qualities and roles of the self that change and are "inevitably multiple and may be judged or reinterpreted in many ways" (73). This distinction suggests that the self is already divided between the physical body that experiences events in place and time, and the self that seeks a story to make sense of the experiences. While there is no such thing as a unified self, there is a desire for a unified *story* of self, a narrative desire to order and present a self that makes sense to one's self and the world.

Composition instructors might do well to borrow the term "narrative identity" because it offers a way to think about self narratives that untangles the material realities from the interpretive process. It also highlights how telling or writing stories of self is an integral aspect to having a sense of self. It also, ultimately, suggests an important distinction between self and self representation, between experience and interpretation. There are always layers of interpretation and there can never be any direct access to self or the experience of self. Contrary to being an easy or romantic activity, self narrative Bruner reminds us, is a necessary component for living. Narrative identity clarifies the role that writing plays in shaping self, dismantling any notion of a romantic self by emphasizing the interpretive work of narrative. It also, however, offers an alternative to the rather bleak portrait of self painted by postmodernism because it focuses on *both* the material reality of a self and the written interpretation of that reality. In other words,

autobiographical theory critiques not only the image of the romantic self, but also the critiques against the romantic self.

In response to the criticism that autobiographical writing indulges an autonomous individual, theorists such as Eakin and Smith introduce us to the concept of "relational narratives," where the decisive impact on the writer is that of either a social environment or institution—such as a family, school, or church—or one where other individuals—usually family members—play a significant role in the text (69). Of course, autobiographical theory has drawn on other disciplines, such as psychology in order to challenge the romantic autonomous individual associated with the genre. In particular, feminist psychoanalyst Jessica Benjamin's notion of intersubjectivity provides a framework for reading and conceptualizing the relational dimension of selfhood that focuses on the connections *between* self and other, rather than on the differences that separate self from other.

Cultural Studies

Part of the problem with the sef in both critical theory and composition studies has been how to navigate between the romantic self and the postmodern erasure of self. While the idea of an autonomous romantic self neglects the role that culture and language play in shaping a self, the postmodern position would remove *all* sense of agency from subjects. As John Trimbur argues in "Composition Studies: Postmodern or Popular," postmodernism's focus on contingent and multiple "selves" can "dissolve the rhetor into a function instead of the agent of discourse, locked in what Frederic Jameson calls a "prison house of language" that offers no escape, no strategy to increase popular

participation in public life" (119). Within the discourse of postmodernism then, rhetors become mere tools of language rather than creative users of it. However, cultural studies offers one antidote to the issue of agency and language by looking at how people use cultural resources and practices to actively interpret and revise their own experiences. In this view, subjectivity is not passive or manipulated, but active and interpretive. Central to this view of agency is the work of French cultural critic and sociologist Michel de Certeau.

In *The Practice of Everyday Life* de Certeau looks at common cultural practices such as walking, cooking, and shopping that are not often considered arenas of cultural inquiry. By emphasizing the aspects of daily life, de Certeau's search is for a conceptual framework that renders the everyday both "ordinary and other" (Buchanan 92). De Certeau is interested in the ways in which people adapt, modify, and use spaces and practices that are often externally imposed. His theory of "tactics" is important in any discussion of agency and provides a useful theoretical framework for thinking about the ways that student writers learn to make do and use the space of the personal essay within the space of the university.

Cultural studies also provides a theoretical lens through which to look at the nature of "experience," a lens that can help composition scholars rethink the value of students' personal writing. Feminist cultural theorist Elspeth Probyn sees that central to concepts of the self is the idea of *experience* which has two distinct registers. The first is an "ontological level" of experience that assumes a separate realm of existence, an "immediate experiential self" of raced, gendered, and sexed beings who exist in the social realm. Probyn refers to this as the metaphysical sense of "being." The second level is the

"epistemological," which recognizes the discursive quality of experience (16). In any working notion of the self, it is necessary to maintain a tension between the ontological and epistemological, or between "being" and "knowing." That is, any idea of self needs to address both the practice of "signification"—such as writing—while also acknowledging the central role of experiences that are grounded in the material world. In a similar way that "narrative identity" separates out the self from the written interpretation of self, Probyn distinguishes between the material, physical experiences of being in the world and the ways that individuals make meaning, interpret, and understand these lived experiences. This distinction calls for a more careful and nuanced discussion of self narratives as works of *representation* and *interpretation*.

Writing self narratives then are the means by which writers perform the epistemological work of examining and interpreting lived or ontological experience. Like narrative identity, writing is how we come to know, understand, and work with the lived experience of daily life. Probyn, drawing from the work of cultural theorist Stuart Hall, uses the term "articulated" to describe this act of writing about lived experience. Hall's notion of an articulation is useful for thinking through the work of self narrative:

> [a]n articulation is thus the form of the connection that can make a unity of two different elements, under certain conditions. It is a linkage which is not necessary, determined, absolute and essential for all time. You have to ask, under what conditions can a connection be forged or made? So the so-called 'unity' of a discourse is really the articulation of different, distinct elements which can be rearticulated in different ways because they have no necessary 'belongingness.' (Hall 53, cited in Probyn 28)

Hall's concept of articulation illuminates the work of self narratives in important ways. Rather than viewing either the self or the representation of that self as fixed or absolute, both are seen as an ongoing project formed within specific historical conditions and

discursive conventions. In articulating the self then, a writer creates a temporary sort of unity by linking together certain forms of self with certain experiences or values. If the autobiographical project is viewed as an "articulation between" the epistemological and ontological levels of experience, it offers a way to theorize the self that avoids both the romantic version of an essential, true self, as well as the poststructuralist reduction of the self to a matter of language. This view of "articulation" helps us see how White, Karr, and the student writer from chapter one, Patricia Burke, write about an "I" that is temporary and shifting. To view self narrative as an articulation provides a space from which to analyze the self as both a "practice and as a speaking position" (29) and maintains the necessary tension between the ontological and the epistemological that keeps the self from falling into either solipsism or irrelevance.

Probyn contributes to current autobiographical thinking on self by introducing a view of the self as "le pli" which means the 'pleat' or 'fold.' This image of the self is based on a series of pleats that fold into themselves, thus bringing together the outside with the inside. As Probyn writes, "The act of 'pleating' or 'folding'...is thus the doubling-up, the refolding, the bending-unto-itself of the line of the outside in order to constitute the inside/outside—the modes of the self" (129). The idea of "le pli" sustains the connections and interconnections between self and selves, between self and other, between inner and outer, and between private and public. With each fold or bend, we can reconstitute a self and re-imagine a self because there is never just one fold, or one permanent bend, but many different combinations and pleats. The image of the pleat offers an image of the self that is neither fixed, nor impossible but fluid and revisable.

In (re)turning to the material—the "being" of experience in the material world, the field of cultural studies offers a way out of the postmodern condition of subjectivity. Distinguishing between "being" and "knowing" untangles the self from the representation of the self in important ways, offering a view of self that is neither grounded in modernist notions of authenticity nor denies the self a ground to stand upon. Likewise, the image of the self as a pleat or fold, offers a way to conceptualize the self that resists binary oppositions between self and other, between private and public, between interior and exterior. As both published autobiographies and student essays reveal, the self is always in process, always bending and folding in upon itself. This view of the relationship between self and experience provides a useful lead into rhetorical theory and the ways in which the term *ethos* may, in fact, provide an alternative to the problematic term voice.

Rethinking *Ethos*

The term *ethos* derives from classical rhetoric and is associated with the establishment of character in the making of a convincing argument. In *The Rhetoric*, Aristotle outlines three modes of persuasion or appeals available to a rhetor: the logical appeal (*logos*), the pathetic appeal (*pathos*), and the ethical appeal (*ethos*). The logical appeal depends on the "kind of poof, or apparent proof, provided by the words of the speech itself." The pathetic appeal involves using or appealing to emotion to put the audience "into a certain frame of mind." The ethical appeal "depends on the personal character of the speaker" (*The Rhetoric*, Bk I, ch. 2, 24).

In order to establish and maintain *ethos*, a rhetor needs to persuade an audience of his or her: moral character (*arête*), good will (*eunoia*), and good sense (*phronesis*).

Moral character or *arête* is displayed by the rhetor by providing evidence that he (or she) is sincere and trustworthy. Good will or *eunoia* is demonstrated by a rhetor who can prove his or her good intentions towards an audience by "holding some of their basic aspirations, speaking their language, and if necessary, sharing and affirming their prejudices" (Kinneavy 176). "Good sense" or *phronesis* is established by how well the rhetor can demonstrate their effective understanding of the issue at hand. *Phronesis* "seeks to apply general principles of right action to specific circumstances, merging theory with practice" (Kinneavy 179). *Ethos* has historically been understood as a skill acquired by the speaker to persuade an audience of his or her credibility and character, but in many ways it is also a form of a cultural appeal. According to James Kinneavy, "To be convincing, a speaker must exhibit that quality of character that culture, and not the individual, defines as virtue" (180). In order to achieve this, the successful rhetor needs to understand a culture's values.

In terms of writing, however, *ethos* is a more difficult concept to understand. One reason for this is that classical notions of *ethos* have often presented it as "one of several tools in the rhetorician's toolbox" (Schmertz 83). For instance, in *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student*, Edward P.J. Corbett presents *ethos* as the "persuasive value of the speaker's or writer's character" (80):

> The whole discourse must maintain the "image" that the speaker or writer seeks to establish. The ethical appeal, in other words, must be pervasive throughout the discourse. The effect of the ethical appeal might very well be destroyed by a single lapse from good sense, good will, or moral integrity. A note of peevishness, a touch of malevolence, a flash of bad taste, a sudden display of inaccuracy or illogic could jeopardize a person's whole persuasive effort. (82)

In this description, *ethos* is a performance that maintain a certain kind of image. The difficulty lies in pinpointing precisely how one goes about creating an "*ethos*." Corbett acknowledges this when he writes, "[h]ow does one create the impression by a discourse that one is a person of sound sense, high moral character, and benevolent? The question is crucial; unfortunately, the answer must be couched in rather general terms." If a discourse is to exhibit a person's "good sense," then, according to Corbett, it must show that the speaker or writer has an "adequate, if not a professionally erudite, grasp of the subject being talked about." Corbett draws explicit attention to how introductions, conclusions, and style can be markers of *ethos* in a text. The ethical appeal, according to Corbett, is the "hidden persuader" (85) that remains difficult to articulate and even more difficult to point to in a written text.

Furthering the conversation, Sharon Crowley suggests in *Ancient Rhetorics for Contemporary Students* that there are actually two different kinds of *ethos*: "invented" and "situated." Situated *ethos* relies on an existing reputation or public knowledge of the rhetor—such as famous or well-known figures posses. Invented *ethos*, however, is used by a rhetor who "constructs a character for herself within her discourse" (108-110), as less public figures, such as students, would need to do. When we are talking about *ethos* in a text, then, we are speaking about the ways in which a writer (rhetor) creates and maintains this sense of "character."

One of the contemporary problems with classical understandings of *ethos*—beyond the differences between oral and written texts that Crowley points out—is that it suggests that *ethos* is presented as a stable feature of a text. However, feminist rhetorical theory would present *ethos* as more culturally informed and unstable than previously

acknowledged. Rather than being a stable feature in the text, *ethos* exists in the contingent and shifting relationship created between rhetor and audience, rhetor and text, and between text and audience. For example, in her essay "Constructing Essences: *Ethos* and the Postmodern Subject of Feminism," Johanna Schmertz defines *ethos* as "neither manufactured nor fixed, neither tool nor character, but rather the stopping points at which the subject (re)negotiates her own essence to call upon whatever agency that essence enables" (86). Advocating a "pragmatics of naming," Schmertz asks, "What does it mean to identify myself in this way? What sort of agency does this position enable and restrict?" (88). This new understanding of *ethos* proves useful in its emphasis on both one's cultural location and on one's choices—or agency—in writing from that location.

One of the key distinctions that has emerged in this new articulation of *ethos* is between *ethos* as "character" and *ethos* as "habit or custom." James L. Kinneavy and Susan C. Warshauer claim that Aristotle's idea of the ethical appeal "combines elements of compromise and manipulation" (*Ethos* 178). On the one hand, *ethos* means "character"—which as James S. Baumlin and Tita French Baumlin argue, would support a view of a singular self. In their introduction to *Ethos: New Essays on Rhetorical and Critical Theory*, Baumlin and Baumlin write that *ethos* "raises questions concerning the inclusion of the speaker's character as an aspect of discourse, the representation of that character in discourse, and the role of that character in persuasion" (xvii).

On the other hand, Susan Jarratt and Nedra Reynolds argue that *ethos* can also mean "habit" or "custom" which lends itself to the current poststructuralist understanding of self as socially and discursively constructed. In "The Splitting Image: Contemporary Feminisms and the Ethics of *Ethos*," Jarratt and Reynolds argue that *ethos* is a theory of

positionality and that this "positioning is a constant awareness that one always speaks from a particular place in a social structure" (47).

In her essay "*Ethos* as Location: New Sites for Understanding Discursive Authority," Reynolds writes that *ethos* can help us "open up more spaces in which to study writers' subject positions or identity formations, especially to examine how writers establish authority and enact responsibility from positions not traditionally considered authoritative" (326). In her re-examination of the concept of *ethos*, Reynolds seeks to reestablish a more precise meaning of *ethos*—in particular its "connections to space, place, or location" and to reestablish *ethos* as "a social act and as a product of a community's character" (327). In this view, *ethos* connotes the locale and the positionality of a speaking subject, suggesting it is more complex than a tool or strategy that a writer can "put on" or acquire in their text, as Aristotelian rhetoric would have it. This recent view of *ethos* places it at the intersections between various discourses where writers struggle to establish rhetorical authority and can be understood as a "negotiated space where authority is established within and between communities" (334). This link between *ethos* and space is echoed as well by Karen LeFevre who writes that "*Ethos*...appears in the socially created space, in the 'between,' the point of intersection between speaker or writer and listener and reader" (45-46). In other words, *ethos* involves an act of reading on both the part of the writer and the reader. Writers (rhetors, to use the classical term) need to consider their audience, but even more than that, writers need to gauge the values, mores, and narrative conventions familiar to their audience. And they need to convince this imagined audience that they are aligned with them.

To conceive of *ethos* as merely "character" is a view that echoes romantic notions of a singular self. In contrast, seen as habit or custom, *ethos* includes shifting locations and encourages a view of self that is multiple and context specific, highlighting the importance of where one speaks from. *Ethos*, therefore, signifies the social context within which an individual rhetor speaks or writes.

While a great deal of scholarship has paid particular attention to *ethos*, it still remains difficult to know how to apply current theories of *ethos* to personal texts. One of the best examples I have found is Julie Nelson Christophe's article "Reconceiving *Ethos* in Relation to the Personal: Strategies of Placement in Pioneer Women's Writing." While composition's debate over the place of the personal is relatively recent, Christophe demonstrates how Aristotle used *ethos* to outline the relationship between the writer or speaker's character and their audience. By bringing together personal writing from composition studies with classical notions of *ethos* and poststructuralist theories of subjectivity, Christophe argues that we need to examine how writers present a "certain kind of person" in their writing.

Christophe points out that we have been so trained to see logos as "the true measure of an argument" in a text, that we "are not accustomed to reading in any systematic way for *ethos*"(668). Christophe identifies three "strategies of placement" that signal rhetorical strategies writers use in self-representation. The first strategy is the use of "identity statements" where a writer explicitly identifies herself with either a place or a community ("I am a_____"), or as E.B. White put it, "I have since become a salt-water man." The second strategy is a "moral display" which is an attempt by the writer to align herself with the moral standards of a given community. For instance, in Karr's

narrative she may sell pot, but she doesn't sell herself. The third strategy is read through "material associations," which are the ways that writers establish themselves as belonging to specific communities through references to possessions, particular tastes, and specific cultural sensibilities (670-71). For White's narrative, it is important that the nostalgic return is to a pristine Maine lake and not to an over-crowded camp ground in New Jersey. That is, as readers we recognize certain important aspects about White's *ethos* by the information he includes. For instance, his family could afford a month long vacation every summer. His irritation with the arrival of automobiles and outboard motors suggests a certain class while his suspicion of their presence signals that he is part of a particular historical moment. Karr's *ethos* meanwhile is steeped in the culture of 1970s West Texas where she earns money by working a night job and selling pot. What is particularly important in terms of *ethos* is that it highlights how personal narratives are social, cultural, and rhetorical texts. The presentation of a "certain kind of self" is neither natural nor pre-existent but one that involves interpretation and choice, as well as the inclusion of certain facts and the omission of others.

Christophe's focus on the connection between *ethos* and community demonstrates how writers signal continuity and belonging in their self-narratives— a critical move that directly addresses the critique of self-narratives as solipsistic or celebrating a unified self. By reading self narratives rhetorically, as Christophe does, we pay attention to the ways that writers establish a sense of self through their association *with* community, not *apart* from it. While Christophe focuses on 19th century narratives, her strategy for reading offers a frame for reading student narratives today.

Student writers, while not pioneers of the westward expansion, are certainly writers who have left behind a home community for a new community. It is possible to read their personal narratives for the ways in which they negotiate a self in the space between these multiple identities and what are often conflicting social communities, a condition that postcolonial scholar Homi K. Bhabha describes as "liminality" and refers to the moments that are "produced in the articulation of cultural differences." These "'in-between' spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood—singular or communal—that initiate new signs of identity" (1332). While Bhabha is concerned with questions of post-colonial identity, his articulation of the "in-between" spaces is useful in thinking about how even first-year student writing reveals specific struggles with cultural forms of narrative, particular kinds of values, and specific rituals of belonging that inform all communities.

The recent re-examination of *ethos* suggests not only a new perspective on rhetorical terms, but a different perspective on language itself. While "narrative identity" highlights the role that language (whether spoken or written) plays in shaping a self, *ethos* refers to the kind of person who is presented. This view of language, in other words, isn't about what language refers to or who it communicates with, but about how language is used and for what effect. According to David Bleich, language is material "in the sense that it has tangible effects and that it matters all the time" (469). To approach language as material is to see it as part of—not apart from—everyday life and physical bodies. It is a view echoed in the work of Michel de Certeau, who is invested in how language gets used by everyone—not just what the "expert" language users do (Bleich 475). The words we speak, write and read demonstrate our memberships within specific

identity roles, families, and communities. To consider how language gets used, and to what effect, reorients the question over personal writing by highlighting the ways in which language itself is not private, but rather always exists within the public domain.

Ethos and The Student Essay

Nedra Reynolds argues that composition scholars need to "investigate the way in which our discourses and teaching practice construct and affect student writers, especially in terms of their fragile identities within the university and between the sometimes painfully confusing states of their emerging authority as speakers and writers." One way to do this, according to Reynolds, is to examine "the places where our practices, language, and attitudes come together or collide with the subjects of these practices, student writers" (335). While Reynolds has undertaken the task of theorizing the *ethos* of the whole field of composition, I am interested in the *ethos* that student writers construct in their autobiographical writing. With its emphasis on location and relationship, *ethos* may be the most precise term to describe the negotiations with multiple selves, cultures, and communities that writers of self-narratives inevitably encounter.

If critics dismiss personal writing as a celebration of an autonomous individual or an authentic voice they do not see the complexity of representing the self and experience in a textual form. Such criticism conflates the ontological—the being—with the epistemological—the knowing. If the debate over the value of students' personal narratives is considered in light of recent critical interventions into ideas of self, experience, and voice, then new questions emerge. In *Mirror Talk: Genres of Crisis in Contemporary Autobiography*, Susanna Egan agues that readers of autobiography need to

learn to identify the "resistant strategies that untrammel the subject from discursive helplessness." She goes on to ask: "What are these strategies? How do autobiographers co-opt and adapt the genres that express this fraught moment of in-between? How do they spell out their intersubjective or their relational selves?" (4). Egan's questions are ones both instructors and students might raise about the role of agency and about reading strategies that recognize agency. While her interest is in published autobiographies, these same questions have direct bearing on students' personal narratives.

In my reading of student essays from Boston College's *Fresh Ink*, I find that students rarely render their experiences as "complete and noncontradictory" (Faigley). Nor do I find that most student writers compose selves that ignore "cultural and historical determinants of individual identity" (France). Instead I find that students' personal essays are most often *about* the moments of "in-between." Rather than being "written by" these discourses, as postmodern critics might suggest, it is possible to read students' personal essays as textual spaces where writers resist, complicate, and (re)write cultural scripts.

This dissertation extends the conversation about the role of personal writing in composition studies by investigating the autobiographical self as an *articulation.* Rather than reading personal narratives as celebrations of a romantic autonomous self, I read them for what Elaine Orr has defined as "negotiations" between the individual and the social, the self and other, the private and the public. [2] As written self-representations,

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[2] According to Orr, negotiation is a name "for the subject's construction of a self...through artful movements among discreet and even competing loyalties" (xi). Negotiation is a way of working between dominant and marginal systems through "simultaneous acts of accommodation and critique" (4). For example, students' personal

students' personal essays consider both the practices and problematics of speaking as a self. In the following chapters, I will use the term *ethos* to refer to the rhetorical tactics of writers who describe a self in relation to gendered identity, family relationships, and the multiple communities they live in and move through.

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narratives are written and read within the institutional demands of the university writing classroom which includes tacit codes of behavior and belonging.

CHAPTER III

'POETS OF THEIR OWN AFFAIRS': (RE)FIGURING IDENTITY AND AGENCY

Where is the place that you move into the landscape and can see yourself?

--Carolyn Steedman, "Landscape for a Good Woman"

In a recent conversation with an academic administrator at a four-year college about the role of reading in a writing classroom, he shook his head in dismay. "It's not that they're illiterate," he said. "It's that they are *non*-literate." It took a moment for his comment to sink in, and then I suggested that students were indeed literate, but perhaps in a way not valued by some members of the academic community. His comment, however, has stayed with me because it represents a familiar view of undergraduate students as lacking in almost every regard. Here, for example, is a brief sample of three views of students from a single issue of *College English* (March 2003):

- Jonathon Mauk: "[a]s I illustrate in this essay, significant numbers of college students are lost" (369).
- Margaret Mackey: "[u]nderstanding and valuing what students bring into the classroom in terms of contemporary literacies is an important prerequisite to engaging them in developing those literacies further" (390).
- Laura L. Behling: "working with unsophisticated readers in an early American literature course…I often encounter resistance" (420).

I'm interested in these sentences not because they are exceptional, but because they are common. They are a random and current sampling of descriptions of students as represented in the professional literature of English studies. If we were to sketch briefly a portrait of today's college student based on these three sentences, we see a person without direction, without writing skills, and without reading skills. To put it another way, students are imagined as passively lost outsiders who don't speak the "right" language or read the "right" way. Within the university community they are continually positioned as "other." At the same time, in disciplines other than English, references to or consideration of students are altogether absent from academic journals. While I find it important that thinking about students is a vital aspect of composition studies, what is missing from these descriptions—and from many conversations about student writing—is a view of students as *agents* of their own learning and writing.

I'm not suggesting that these descriptions of students are completely wrong. On the contrary, I would agree that in teaching English we want students to develop a richer understanding of multiple literacies and to delve more deeply into texts and interpretations. What interests me, however, is the *language* used in the professional literature to describe students and the assumptions that paint students in general terms with broad brush strokes and that render them in need of...well, a lot. This chapter explores the role of agency as revealed in students' personal essays that are about aspects of identity—gender, sexuality, and race.

In *Reading Autobiography*, Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson focus on agency as one of their key questions for approaching and understanding autobiographical texts:

> People tell stories of their lives through the cultural scripts available to them, and they are governed by cultural scripts about self-

> presentation in public. Given these constraints, how do people change the narratives or write back to the cultural stories that have scripted them as particular kinds of subjects? How is this "writing back," this changing of the terms of one's representation, a strategy for *gaining agency*? (176)

The concept of agency that Smith and Watson apply to autobiography offers a different way to approach student personal narratives as well. Student writers are writing in a situation governed by multiple constraints: they are writing "personally" within an impersonal institution, they are writing as outsiders to the dominant conventions, and ultimately, they are writing for an academic who will grade them. Not only are student writers governed by "cultural scripts" in their larger community, but also by academic "scripts" embedded within the university community. In many ways students are writing from multiple kinds of "in-between" positions. If, as Susan Jarratt and Nedra Reynolds argue, *ethos* is a theory of positionality, the positions our students write from and out of, deserve a closer look. Given that student writers are not in a position of authority, how do they establish authority in their writing? What kinds of identities are they invoking, reforming, or rewriting? What, if any, rhetorical tactics do they use to gain some sense of agency?

Underlife and Tactics

In "Underlife and Writing Instruction," Robert Brooke draws on the work of sociologist Erving Goffman and the theory of "underlife" to explore the strategies adopted by students that subvert traditional student roles and expectations of the American educational system. The concept of "underlife" rests on the assumptions that identity is a function of social interaction, that social interaction itself is a "system of information games," and that social organizations provide roles for individuals that

suggest certain kinds of identities (142). "Underlife" consists of the activities that individuals engage in to show that they are more complex than the identities assigned them by others.

Brooke studies the physical dynamics of a first-year writing classroom to see how students engage in underlife behavior. He discovers four major types of underlife: 1) students find uses for classroom materials different from those intended by the teacher (often these take place in private conversations between students); 2) students are highly aware of the roles that people take in the classroom and frequently comment on them (what Brooke describes as "gamesplaying"); 3) students explicitly evaluate what happens in class; and 4) students often engage in private activity that diverts attention away from the rest of the class (144-48). Small group discussions that "go off" task, for example, or students who are studying for a different class, are both forms of underlife behavior. Brooke also makes a case that the methods often used by writing teachers—such as workshops or small groups—are examples of pedagogical "underlife" in that teachers explicitly reject the role of "teacher-as-lecturer" (141). Ultimately, Brooke argues that

> Writing...asks individuals to accept their own underlfe, to accept the fact that they are never completely subsumed by their roles, and instead can stand apart from them and contemplate. Writing instruction seeks to help the learner see herself as an original thinker, instead of as a "student" whose purpose is to please teachers by absorbing and repeating information. (151-52)

Brooke's use of "underlife" suggests that both students and teachers assert agency within the larger institutional setting of the classroom. His view of writing and writing pedagogy takes into consideration the roles that individuals play, but also the ways in which individuals assert their difference from those roles. Brooke's study is influential in opening up ways to talk about the multiple dynamics (seen and unseen) of a given space

such as a classroom. By drawing on cultural studies, we can extend Brooke's study of student behavior in a classroom to the rhetorical strategies students use in their writing to create a kind of narrative "underlife."

In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, French cultural critic Michel de Certeau states that his aim is a "part of a continuing investigation of the ways in which users—commonly assumed to be passive and guided by established rules—operate" (xi). One of de Certeau's goals is to critically inspect the cultural practices such as reading, cooking, walking, and shopping that reside in the background, unseen, and unexamined. As part of his study of cultural practices, de Certeau studies the ways in which "users make (*bricolent*) innumerable and infinitesimal transformations of and within the dominant economy in order to adapt it to their own interests and their own rules" (xiv). He studies what he calls the "cultural activity of the non-producers of culture, an activity that is unsigned, unreadable, and unsymbolized" (xvii). In other words, de Certeau is not interested in the well known producers of culture—movie stars—nor is he necessarily interested in what they produce—movies. Instead, de Certeau is interested in what happens when people watch the film, in how people take in the film, and what they *do* with the cultural material provided from the activity and process of watching the film. In like manner, an argument could be made for reading students as the "non-producers of culture" within the academy and for viewing their writing—what Robert Scholes terms "pseudo-nonliterature"—as a form of cultural activity that is often unrecognized. While student texts are *written texts*—and therefore signed, readable, and symbolized—I would argue that they are rarely considered important compared to the consumption of literature.

Brooke's notion of "underlife" is similar to what de Certeau calls "tactics." Tactics describe the ways that workers do their own work and disguise it as work for the employer--such as writing a personal letter at work (25). Much like students who prepare for their next class or who hastily finish their assignment during small group work, de Certeau's tactics describe the ways that individuals resist being completely dominated by the larger institutions they are part of. As de Certeau explains it:

> The space of a tactic is the space of the other. Thus it must play on and with a terrain imposed on it and organized by the law of foreign power. It does not have the means to *keep to itself*, at a distance, in a position of withdrawal, foresight, and self-collection: it is a maneuver "within the enemy's field of vision"...and within enemy territory...It operates in isolated actions, blow by blow. It takes advantage of "opportunities" and depends on them, being without any base where it could stockpile its winnings, build up its own position, and plan raids. What it wins it cannot keep. (37)

It is interesting that de Certeau defines "tactics" in terms of the battlefield ("tactic is an art of the weak") because I sense that many students feel like they are entering "foreign territory" when they walk into a composition classroom; many have had negative experiences with reading and writing, and most are taking a required course. In other words, students talk, write, and read within the space that is not theirs. Both class discussions and writing assignments put students in what they may see as vulnerable positions—out in the open, unguarded, easy prey for criticism from classmates and teachers alike.

In fact, the functions of the university itself seem to fit de Certeau's definition of a "strategy": "strategies are actions which, thanks to the establishment of a place of power...elaborate theoretical places...capable of articulating an ensemble of physical places in which forces are distributed" (38). Strategies are the structures that support and

maintain the institution. In the case of the university, strategies range from examinations, required writing assignments and grades, to institutional practices such as the hiring, retention and promotion of faculty. Tactics, then, are "ways of operating" for those who reside in the margins of the "place of power." They are employed most by those who have developed what de Certeau terms the "art of being in between" (30). While de Certeau's examples are most often immigrants or colonial subjects, it is useful to consider how his framework might offer composition studies a way of seeing students and their writing.

I don't mean to suggest a facile equation between students and colonized subjects or between academia and empire, but I do want to point out the power differential within the university creates the conditions where resistance and "making do" happen in complex ways in student writing. Consumers, argues de Certeau, learn to "make do" and "imposed knowledge and symbolisms become objects manipulated by practitioners who have not produced them" (32). Student writers, then, are in a position of becoming these users and the work of de Certeau offers a way of theorizing the "in-between" space that so many student writers occupy, both within the institution of the university and within their own writing. The remainder of this chapter will look again at the *Fresh Ink* collection of student essays and what they reveal about gender roles. Grounded in de Certeau's concept of "making do," I investigate three kinds of "tactics" that student writers employ as they write out of, and back to, gendered identity: border crossing, creative deviancy, and bricolage. Each of these tactics demonstrates the ways writers acknowledge dominant social identities while simultaneously working against them in a process of revision and re-examination.

The Border Crosser

In the essay "The Rock Cycle" (1999), Pete Sorge writes about the ritual of working with his father on his grandfather's peach farm. He uses his experiences of manual labor to consider his relationship with his father, but also to meditate on what it means to become a man.

Pete begins his essay by describing the process of spreading pulverized limestone on the fields. He explains that limestone is "part of working the land. It's somehow important to the soil's preparation to yield again...I don't understand the concept, but I know the process." He describes how he pours the limestone into a spreader: "I shut my eyes and reach my hand in. The powder flows like water; I could swear it's liquid" (39). The ability of the limestone to be two things at once—to be stone, but to flow like liquid—is important because in the second paragraph Pete moves from the physical characteristics of limestone to a metaphorical comparison:

> Men are like crushed limestone, like something you don't expect. At least my dad is, and I hope I'll be, too. My dad is a scary guy. He terrified the hell out of me when I was a kid. In the mornings when I crept in to wake my mom, I made sure never to disturb him. If I'd done something wrong, I'd try to hide it so he wouldn't find out—but he usually did. My friends still think he's scary, quiet and contemplative. Sometimes when my sisters bring home some guy, my dad and I act tough together, laugh at inside jokes, just to seem hard. We have our own language. (39)

This paragraph begins with a simile that compares men to limestone—both can be hard and soft at the same time. This first section of the paragraph describes the hard side of Pete's father—the fear he felt as a child and the machinations he would go through to avoid his father physically. But the paragraph ends with Pete having both discovered and nurtured this dual side in both his father and himself. He joins with his father in acting

"tough together" in order to "seem hard." The language they share is one that recognizes this dual nature and the tacit codes of what goes unsaid.

Pete reads the "cultural script" of masculine identity and attempts to decode it. He writes about the experiences on the farm by juxtaposing them to the realm of his home. Part of what makes Pete's memories of these week-ends with his father important is that they exist apart from the world of his mother. The ritual of working on the farm begins with blue jeans and a jeep ride:

> In all the years we've owned it, my mother has never ridden in the jeep, never even touched it. It has no top, no seat belts; it is truly unsafe. It's like one of those old army jeeps you see on M*A*S*H, almost exactly. When I was a boy, there was nothing better in life than riding beside my father in the jeep. The entire spirit of it was male. One time we passed a biker on a big old Harley, the type who wouldn't give us a second look if we were riding in my mom's minivan, and as we passed he gave us a thumbs-up. (40)

Language in Pete's essay is often unspoken—understood in the gesture of a "thumbs-up" or an inside joke. While Pete imagines the jeep as the space of pure masculinity, both the jeep and the realm of the farm are framed by the larger landscape of the domestic house. In other words, the masculine space is defined by, and within, what Pete sees as the feminine.

Pete, however, is able to inhabit and comment on both the realms of the farm and of his home. In this manner he creates an *ethos* that becomes a border crosser by meditating (both directly and indirectly) on the role that language plays in shaping the different worlds he inhabits, as well as the different kinds of masculine identities available to him:

> On the farm, I got to be a boy. Not a neighborhood boy, but a Huck Finn sort of boy. On the farm, work and play were the same thing. I discovered tractors, barns, bones, dirt, grass, animals, tools, and fire. My home life was women: I was the only boy in a family of five children. We

> lived in the sort of house where the toilet seat is always down. I wasn't good at any of the conventional sports. The farm restored the strength and confidence I lost by being the last kid picked during recess games. (40)

This passage is a rich example of the kind of *ethos* that Pete's essay displays. There are multiple identity statements at work: "I got to be a boy...a Huck Finn sort of boy," "I was the only boy of five children," and "I wasn't good at any of the conventional sports." Each of these provides readers with information about the certain kind of person that Pete presents, in particular the certain kind of masculine identity that he aligns himself with. This is an *ethos* of the independent outsider which invokes what has come to be seen as a classic masculine cultural script. Characterized by self-education, self-discipline, and a focus on the world of work, the "secular hero" often portrays himself as the sole agent of his story (Conway 22-25). To identify himself this way is to identify with a long line of successful American autobiographical selves from Benjamin Franklin to Lee Iacocca.

There is, however, an interesting discrepancy at work that reveals how *ethos* exists at the intersection of multiple communities and discourses since it's also clear that Pete's *ethos* doesn't quite fit this classic script. He is, by his own definition, an outsider in his family (as the only boy) and an outcast on the playground (he's not good at any of the sports.) While this seems to be setting the stage for the rise of the individual, Pete's essay complicates this by writing about his relationship with his grandfather and father. Pete highlights the codes of silence that structure his father's life as a lone silent man, but doesn't replicate them. In fact, Pete's essay explores—and exposes—the multiple codes that govern the scripts of the silent strong man. Pete understands his father's silence, but

he also decides that he wants a more articulate version of this relationship for his own son. In doing this, he complicates his own identification with the role of the silent man.

While a great deal of feminist scholarship has critiqued traditional models of autobiographical selfhood, Paul John Eakin argues that we also need to "liberate men's autobiography from the inadequate model that has guided our reading to date" (49). And perhaps there has been no greater myth for American men than the myth of the autonomous, separate individual. Eakin asks, "[h]ow, then, to recognize both the autonomous and the relational dimensions of men's and women's lives without placing them in opposition?" (52). Following the work of Eakin, we can read Pete's essay not only as a performance of masculinity, but also as a revision of conventional codes of silence.

Pete's essay is built around a series of oppositions—the jeep of his father versus the minivan of his mother, his grandfather's house versus his own home (where the toilet seat is always down), and the regulated work of school versus the cyclical work of farming. As a writer he navigates both sides of these opposite terrains and, as a result, ends up residing in the space between:

> We moved into my grandfather's house soon after he died, and my father now runs the farm in addition to his regular job. The house sits pushed off the road in the same place it always has. A new coat of paint, white with green shutters, commemorates the passing of the place to the next generation. But the barns still lean, proudly displaying their age, and the Kubota still runs, its blue [sic] metal a little more brown from more hours of work. The peaches still bloom pink.
>
> The house is different, though. My mother and my sisters are there. The kitchen has been refinished, the wood a lighter stain. The table we used to sit at went into the dumpster with the rest of my grandfather's things. The toilet seats are down.
>
> The days I get to spend with my father are still something special. It is strange to see time changing us both. I am no longer too small and young

> for jobs; he is beginning to remind me of my grandfather. I imagine bringing my son to visit him here, just as he brought me. I see the three of us, seemingly solid and stern like rock, but more. (42)

Pete ends his essay with the eventual merging of the ritualized masculine space of the farm with the more orderly, domesticated space signaled by the presence of his mom and sisters. The space that existed "outside" or alongside this other world has, in a sense, been lost. But for Pete what remains and what endures is a transformed understanding of not only masculine possibilities, but his own selfhood.

In *The Culture of Education* Jerome Bruner suggests two universal aspects of selfhood—agency and evaluation. Agency is the sense that one can both initiate and carry out activities on one's own. According to Bruner, we create a record of "agentive encounters with the world" that is related to the past but that is also connected with the future—what he refers to as "self with history and with possibility" (36). In other words, we have the need to see ourselves as being able to take action rather than merely being acted upon.

While we view the self as agentive, we also evaluate how effective this self is, or has been, in being or doing what we hoped for. Bruner refers to this combination of agency and evaluation as "self-esteem" and writes that it "combines our sense of what we believe ourselves to be (or even hope to be) capable of and what we fear is beyond us" (36-37). Pete's essay portrays the author as an agent within the realm of the farm, in contrast to the world of school and home where Pete felt acted upon. By showing his readers that he was not an integral part of either of these places, Pete establishes the peach farm as the necessary setting for him to become an *actor* in his life, ultimately, the arena where he finds success in being the kind of boy he wants to be, validated by the

companionable silence he finds working alongside his father. Narrative, writes Bruner, helps people "create a version of the world in which, psychologically, they can envisage a place for themselves—a personal world" (39). In *Storied Lives: The Cultural Politics of Self-Understanding*, George C. Rosenwald and Richard L. Ochberg examine how telling personal stories helps people form a sense of identity:

> [t]he stories people tell about themselves are interesting not only for the events and characters they describe but also for something in the construction of the stories themselves. How individuals recount their histories—what they emphasize and omit, their stance as protagonists or victims, the relationship the story establishes between teller and audience—all shape what individuals can claim of their own lives. Personal stories are not merely a way of telling someone (or oneself) about one's life; they are means by which identities may be fashioned. (1)

All stories are told within the narrative frames offered by a given culture and "these frames of intelligibility determine and limit the power of personal narrative" (2). As a writer, Pete works within the "frames of intelligibility" offered by our late 20th century stories of masculine identity, and is a thoughtful examination of how the author began to see himself as a man and the space and place that made this possible. However, by examining his father's silence he becomes a border crosser who is able to imagine alternate possibilities for his own son.

The Creative Deviant

In the 1996 collection of *Fresh Ink*, Maura Catherine Lamodore explores the complicated terrain of Barbie dolls, body image, and feminine identity in her essay "Being Barbie." She describes her childhood love/hate relationship with Barbie and her preference for the feisty adventurous girls she reads about in fiction. What is of

particular interest in Maura's insightful essay are the ways that her critique of Barbie extends both outward towards social norms and inward to her own self-understanding.

Maura opens her essay with the question, "Why do girls continue to buy Barbie Dolls? Even as a child I ridiculed her plastic smile, her stupid wide eyes popped open in perpetual surprise." Listing off her own preferred female role models—including Lucy from *The Chronicles of Narnia* and Pippi Longstocking—Maura writes, "I was a cowgirl, a sailor, an astronaut, not a Barbie Doll." The crux of this essay, however, resides in the mixed emotions that Maura captures in her relationship to Barbie. As she writes, "I hated my Barbies, but I still played with them" (61).

Maura divides her essay into two parts by a white space. In the first half, she details her childhood fascination and distaste for Barbie, describing a long list of the transgressive acts she inflicted on her Barbies: she died Barbie's hair black, "made" her Barbie join a punk rock band, tossed her high into trees, and threw her in streams in order to rescue her "helpless damsels in distress." As a consumer, Maura "uses" Barbie in ways not intended by Mattel. As she writes, "I was always stronger than my crew of Barbies—their protector. My Barbies needed me, I gave them life—without me they were just a whiny bunch of plastic monsters. Now those Barbies hide in the immense toy closet in the basement, ashamed of their Mohawks and dirty faces and missing legs" (61). According to de Certeau, telling stories ("tales") about playing games offers an audience both the rules of the game, as well as strategies for playing: "in replaying the games, telling about them, these accounts record the rules and the moves simultaneously" (23). Games, and stories of playing games, are also a means to teach the tactics that might be possible within a given culture. In other words, Maura demonstrates her knowledge of

the "right" way to play with Barbies by describing the "wrong" way. Within her narrative then, Maura details acts of resistance to what Barbie represents. Her games with Barbie show how she acknowledges certain rules of playing and of gender roles but also shows how she takes action to alter and revise both. Later in the essay, Maura juxtaposes the *ethos* of her young rebellious self with her more current sense of self—a self who is no longer so certain how to alter and rewrite the cultural scripts of femininity.

Even in her rejection of Barbie, Maura is fascinated by her: "I realized then what everyone realizes now—that Barbie embodies antifeminist ideals–but I was still drawn to her. Her vapid smile was mysteriously seductive. I wanted to gaze into Barbie's purple-blue eyes, braid her hair, dress her...And I did, deciding that she was innocuous, that she couldn't harm me." Maura struggles to align herself with the adventurous and strong fictional characters she admires—she will be the rescuer and protector. She believes she will somehow transcend Barbie's mysterious lure:

> That's where I was mistaken. Her very existence affected my life. At the moment this symbol of perfection was handed to me, when I was four, I changed. She was the first modelof a woman (other than my mother) that I had—a sex symbol with flawless features and a perfect body. And she made me believe that I too needed to have a perfect body, not a blemish on my perpetually smiling face, that a woman is in the world to look at and have fun with but serves no intellectual purpose whatsoever. Maybe that's also why I hated her, since woman-as-sex-symbol was a concept that I as a four-year-old could never understand. (62)

Not only is Barbie a model of bodily perfection, but she is also a symbol of women as sex objects. Unlike the fictional heroines who resided in Maura's imagination, Barbie was tangible, curvaceous, and already imagined for her. In Maura's play, however, she asserted her agency by becoming author, director, and creator of Barbie's role.

In the second half of Maura's essay, she moves from the divided feelings about Barbie that she experienced as a child, to the schism she now senses in her own adult identity. As she writes, "Even today, Barbie is a part of me. But now I am not playing with a doll, I've been handed the Barbie role. I *am* Barbie, and I hate that." This self-conscious exploration of the divided self is another one of Maura's "tactics" that she uses to write back to the cultural scripts of femininity.

By declaring her conflicted feelings for Barbie—the fascination and the repulsion—Maura establishes an *ethos* that is located in this "in-between" space: she is not a heroine who successfully rejects gender roles, but neither is she passively fulfilling a culturally designated gender role. By transitioning from her earlier identity statement "I was a cowgirl, a sailor, an astronaut," to her later identity statement, "I *am* Barbie," Maura's essay turns from a critique of Barbie to an examination of the ways in which she herself has come to embody Barbie. Maura captures this sense of multiple selves quite literally as she describes an experience on her college campus:

> Recently Barbie and I were approaching a building. Two guys, who were quite a ways ahead of us, were also going in. One of them waited and waited for us, holding the door open, an exaggerated look of patience on his face.
>
> "Go on in, lady," he said.
>
> "Thanks a lot, I've got it," I told him. But he refused to release the door.
>
> "No, go ahead, it's a bit heavy." His voice was insistent now, a little angry.
>
> The condescending manner in which he had spoken to us made me want to scream, *I can open the door myself.* But Barbie was so far in the other direction, had been so programmed to bow down to a man, that she held back. She wanted to giggle and sweep into the building, her blond curls rolling flirtatiously behind. (62)

In this passage Maura enacts the doubled, conflicted identification with Barbie that she has been writing about. No longer playing with Barbie, she has, as she writes "been handed the Barbie role." And it's a role that those around her expect her to participate in as evidenced by the guy who insists on holding the door. By invoking the plural pronoun "we" and including Barbie in this description of self, Maura effectively breaks the rules of narrative. It is an example of what literary critic Kim Worthington calls "creative deviancy" (102). Maura breaks a narrative rule (the "I" of autobiographical discourse suggests a singular self), but by doing so she uses language to show the impact of Barbie on her everyday life. Language use, as Worthington writes, is "always more than an act of reinscription. In language we can challenge, question, and even shape the plural communities within which we are determined; creative language use is a condition of our partial self-determination as subjects of/in discourse" (114). If it is the Barbie self that silences her, it is writing that gives Maura another chance to tell this story and in telling it, she is able to give voice to the prior silence.

The *ethos* that Maura establishes, like Pete's, resides in the complex intersection between several positions. For instance, Maura's critique of Barbie signals her shared values with a feminist community. However, she complicates this by questioning her own participation in this discourse, a move that Vivian Gornick calls "self-implication." Gornick, a memoirist and essayist, believes that "To see one's own part in the situation—that is—one's own frightened or cowardly or self-deceived part" is necessary in a personal essay (35-36).

Articulating and describing socially defined identities, as both Pete and Maura do, would be tactics that, according to de Certeau, assert agency. By identifying and naming the often unnamed borders of gendered identity, these student writers become border crossers that reside in an "in-between" place that recognizes cultural norms for men and women, but that also questions them. However, I use the term border crossing with hesitation and caution. Theories of borders and border crossing have been explored primarily by feminist theorists and postcolonial scholars and the term has come to be associated with particular conditions of marginalization from the dominant culture.

Gloria Anzaldua, for example, has used the term to describe not only the border between Texas and Mexico, but also the spiritual, psychological, and sexual borderlands that she experiences as a Chicana. Wendy Hesford describes the concept of borderlands as one that moves "between centers and margins, dismantling traditional notions of singular selves and stable places of origin. Border residents are fluid, neither completely inside nor powerlessly outside dominant cultures" (49). Border crossers are those who navigate back and forth, who reside in the space that is in-between center and margin. However, as Hesford cautions, "Who is crossing what borders? Who is in the position to create border identities? Are border crossers forced into such acts, or are such movements and crossings of their own choosing?" (52). In a similar vein, Caren Kaplan warns that "[o]ppositional consciousness can not simply be put on like a cloak, it is shaped by experiences of oppression" (cited in Hesford, 51). Both Kaplan and Hesford write about the dangers of "representational colonialism" that can be the result of appropriating a term that has a specific meaning. However, if we understand identity as "culturally, politically, and pedagogically shifting," as Hesford suggests, than part of that

project is one of articulating (or attempting to articulate) the terrain one sees in this shifting landscape. In this sense, border crossing can be a useful idea to articulate the multiple positions from which one writes. In fact, one of the important goals of a pedagogy of personal writing is to create the conditions necessary for student writers to engage in border crossing. That is, autobiographical writing assignments can invite this reflexive, self-critical thinking from student writers. Here, I want to make a case for thinking of "border crossing" as an important tactic that students can use to spark discussions of the ways in which different kinds of borders are imagined, constructed, and maintained.

Let me return to Pete's essay about fathers and masculine identity for a moment. While I can read his essay as an example of border crossing that works to examine the tacit codes of masculinity, I can also read his essay as one that ends up reinforcing the same borders he seemingly questions. By closing his essay with the imagined image of bringing his own son to work on the farm with his father, Pete's essay ends up reinforcing this cycle of male lineage. While he has created a new kind of space to describe male rituals of silence and the tacit codes of conduct, Pete is not ultimately interested in disrupting them in any significant manner. In other words, Pete's essay reveals masculine identities but doesn't necessarily revise them, which raises interesting questions about academic conventions, as well as about the establishment of *ethos* in the personal essay.

Tom Newkirk, for instance, has pointed out that academics tend to dismiss student narratives that voice beliefs or attitudes that are considered sentimental or clichéd. Yet these very kinds of "self-exhortations" exist throughout popular culture and often carry

weight everywhere except in the classroom. As he writes, "It seems a peculiar form of bait-and-switch to ask students about the significance of their lives and then to recoil when they speak of the virtues of hard work and perseverance" (44). In a similar manner, Lad Tobin wonders about the dismissal of what he calls "characteristically male essays" (98) arguing for "deeper" readings of such essays instead of brushing them off as misogynist texts. Writing teachers, according to Tobin, "too often read male narratives as fixed, reifying our own interpretations, acting as if the meaning of a text can somehow be read right off the page" (98). Tobin suggests that these readings of male narratives often reproduce the problem and "in the face of these male narratives and their authors, we, too become passive aggressive; that is we too hold back and become predictable, superficial, unsophisticated" (98). Both Newkirk and Tobin raise necessary questions about a too-quick dismissal of narratives that don't perform cultural critiques or that seem to conform to certain cultural scripts.

I'd like to offer a reading of Pete's essay that doesn't critique his essay for the affirmation it makes, but that perhaps raises questions about affirmation itself. Rather than a fixed sense of self, the *ethos* that Pete establishes is actually a border crosser in its exploration of multiple communities. The *ethos* of Pete's essay aligns itself with cultural values such as working the land and maintaining family connections to a specific place. Pete's affirmation of these values makes sense. And yet, what conditions make Pete's affirmation possible?

Consider the ending of Maura's essay. Instead of an affirmation, she imagines alternative models for Barbie: "I'd like to see Barbie dump boring Ken and roar off in her car in search of her freedom. I'd like to see a Barbie Library, a Barbie Office, a Jewish

Barbie, or a Football Barbie." However, even these imagined alternatives are still circumscribed by being versions of the same—of Barbie. Ultimately, Maura imagines a bonfire of Barbies: "If all the girls of the world gathered up their Barbies...and hurled theminto a bonfire, the dolls would shrink into foul smoke and blackened lumps." This image of the funeral pyre is a dream of collective action and a radical rejection of all things Barbie. The last line of her essay, however, hints at her own sense of impotency to effect lasting social change: "But when the fire had been put out and all the girls went home, would Barbie's acrylic smile still gleam wildly from the embers?" (63). Maura's essay ends with a question that places the issue of Barbie in front of her readers. Unlike Pete's essay which concludes with the comfort of male genealogy, Maura's essay challenges and destroys the legacy of femininity that trails behind the smoldering image of Barbie. The "certain kind of person" that Pete presents is one who can borrow from narrative identities already established in the dominant culture. While I think that Pete's essay complicates this role in interesting ways, it *remains* an available and viable role. Maura's essay is the search for a viable role, for a place to stand and be heard.

The Bricoleur

In the essay "Nappy Heads" (1996), Geraldine Charles critiques standards of beauty that use white women as the norm. She begins her essay by looking at fashion magazines that feature white models, but when she examines magazines targeted to black women, she finds the same thing. Her essay explores the rituals that black women endure in order to straighten their hair and she frames her essay with multiple sources,

including a poem by Gwendolyn Brooks, an article by bell hooks, and personal experience. Here is how she opens her essay:

> When I walk into a room I often find people looking at me. They are staring at my "nappy" head. People widen their eyes as they hear my hair scream celebration of its freedom from the chains of supremacy. My thick rich curls springing from my roots are a slap in the face of society. My hair defies the ideas of society's image of what the perfect woman should look like. (5)

Geraldine asserts agency through what de Certeau calls "bricolage"—a "making do" of texts that surround her from which she is able to write a position of resistance and critique. The texts that Geraldine uses are many: language, American history, popular culture, and lastly, the texts of black feminist writers.

While this essay is personal, her language creates an *ethos* that is located in a very specific historical web. While her essay is "about" hair straightening, the words she uses—"nappy," "freedom," and "chains"—all make a direct reference to the history of American slavery and the centuries of violence inflicted upon black bodies. While one of the "strategies of placement" readers can use to locate *ethos* are identity statements, Geraldine's text does not include one. Rather, it is an identity statement that is silent, assumed, and subsumed within the subject and language of her essay. In *The Racial Contract* Charles Mills makes the case that white supremacy is not an afterthought or a symptom of a racist system, but in fact *is* the system. Mills writes, "[n]onwhites then find that race is, paradoxically, both everywhere and nowhere, structuring their lives but not formally recognized" (76). The establishment of *ethos* for Geraldine—the sense of a "certain kind of person"—addresses race in ways that neither Pete's nor Maura's essays do. Race is not considered part of the location that shapes where they speak from and what they can say. It is in Geraldine's essay. The *ethos* of Geraldine's essay and the

politics of naming are necessarily written against this backdrop of silence on the subject of race.

The other texts that Geraldine works with in her essay are popular women's magazines:

> On the cover of *Cosmopolitan*, *Vogue*, and *Elle*, women with milky white skin and long refined straight hair gleam with contempt. Their exotic smiles and placid stares convey a subliminal message: In order for you to be beautiful you need to look like this. On the cover of *Ebony*, an Afro-American woman is smirking at me. Her promiscuous hair is "neatly combed," every threadlike strand cascading over her shoulders. Her once virgin hair is tired of the abuse of harsh chemicals that reconstruct not only her hair but her self-image as well. She, too, ridicules my hair, denies that our hair is beautiful. When I look at the cover a second time, I try to read her papyrus mind: Why is she smiling? She must be smiling because she has silky straight hair. She thinks she has become someone to be envied. Is she really happy about the changes that society has brought upon black women? (5)

By beginning with a catalogue of three popular magazines, Geraldine exposes the assumptions about women that are embedded in these magazines—that a beautiful woman is not only one with straight hair, but one who is white. When she turns to *Ebony* she finds that the standard of beauty has also infiltrated this magazine aimed at black women. As a writer and a close reader, Geraldine pays careful attention to how language shapes ideology. For example, in describing the ordeal of hair straightening, she uses the language of sexual assault and invokes an entire history of racial and sexual oppression of black women. Geraldine is working with what cultural theorist Pierre Bourdieu has described as the "alienated body"—the body perceived and objectified by both the language and gaze of others (207). The black body in particular, as Mills reminds us, is seen as "paradigmatically *a body*" (51).

In *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination,* novelist Toni Morrison writes that "in matters of race, silence and evasion have historically ruled literary discourse" (9). By writing about race, Geraldine is confronting a long history of silence. By focusing on the question of race in terms of Geraldine's essay, I risk suggesting that race is not an issue for the other writers of the other essays. I risk emphasizing what Peter McLaren calls "raceless subjectivity" (cited in Goodburn, 70). However, out of 225 essays in *Fresh Ink* over nine years, race is rarely mentioned. Race is an identity category that is left silent or assumed since many white students do not consider being white being raced. Mills argues that the system of white supremacy not only depends on fixing the category of race but also requires an "epistemology of ignorance" (18). That is, the cultural, systemic nature of racialization requires policies of evasion, erasure, and self-deception on the part of whites. "To a significant extent," writes Mills, "white signatories will live in an invented delusional world, a racial fantasyland, a 'consensual hallucination'" (18). The absence of any mention of race in many student essays reinforces the assumption that the white body is the normative body and that all nonwhite bodies are different. What I see as a silence on questions of race in the majority of the essays in *Fresh Ink* echoes the larger national silence about race. This raises questions about reading and writing practices that don't interrogate race, thereby assuming a somatic norm of whiteness.

This chapter has examined the tactics that student writers draw on to assert agency in their narratives and to resist being "written by" culture. These tactics also contribute to how each writer establishes an *ethos*—their sense of being a certain kind of

person. There is an important relationship between the tactics they use and the *ethos* they establish. Pete is a border crosser, navigating between the realm of home and the farm, and between the cultural scripts of the lone hero and revised scripts of a more articulate male model. Maura's tactic is to employ creative deviancy—in both her narrative content and narrative structure. She writes about the desire to overthrow a cultural gender identity that she sees as limiting and damaging. And Geraldine becomes a *bricoleur*—drawing from available resources in popular culture to create a critique of the dominant standards of beauty. While Maura's essay raises questions about the subject of the female body, Geraldine's raises questions about the racial identity of that female body. I do not want to suggest that there is a hierarchy of sophistication or critical ability in these three essays. What I do want to suggest is that the presentation of self on paper requires navigating between culturally available models of identity, material realities, and interpretation. These three writers assert agency in their narratives about gendered identity that resist and revise culturally available identities. However, their tactics also highlight how the creation of a "certain kind of person" is dependent on multiple, often silent, variables such as gender, class, and race. If narrative identity, as Bruner suggests, is "guided by unspoken, implicit cultural models of what selfhood should be, might be—and, of course, shouldn't be" (66), then these unspoken and implicit cultural models may need to be looked at more closely.

CHAPTER IV

'ON LIES, SECRETS, AND SILENCE':

READING/WRITING THE FAMILY

Penetrating the familiar is by no means a given. On the contrary, it is hard, hard work.

--Vivian Gornick, *The Situation and the Story: The Art of Personal Narrative*

I make it real by putting it into words. It is only by putting it into words that I make it whole; this wholeness means that it has lost its power to hurt me...

--Virginia Woolf, "Sketch of the Past"

In I-Writing: The Politics and Practice of Teaching First-Persona Writing, Karen Surman Paley looks closely at the exchange between composition scholars David Bartholomae and Peter Elbow regarding the role of students' personal essays. The two well known figures represent what have come to be seen as polarized positions about teaching writing in first-year writing classes, Bartholomae advocating academic discourse instead of personal writing, Elbow arguing for the importance of student voices. The student text around which this debate centers is an essay written by a young woman about her parents' divorce. Bartholomae describes how his whole class reads it and then says that "We've read it because the student cannot invent a way of talking about family, sex roles, separation" ("Writing" 66). He continues:

> I begin by not granting the writer her "own" presence in that paper, by denying the paper's status as a record of or a route to her own thoughts and feelings. I begin instead by asking her to read her paper as a text already written by the culture, representing a certain predictable version of the family, the daughter, and the writer. I begin by being dismissive. (cited in Paley 17)

As Bartholomae sees it, this student's narrative only serves to reinforce what he refers to as the "master narrative" of family (cited in Paley 198). In other words, he is dismissive not because the student has nothing to say, but because she cannot say anything that is not already "written" for her in cultural scripts of family. Interestingly enough, Paley points out that Elbow's response is also one of dismissal: "[I]f this paper were the first one of the semester, I would give no response at all" (cited in Paley 91). What is not clear from this exchange is *why* Elbow would choose to not respond. Perhaps it is based in an assumption that the student narrative is too private, too personal, and therefore not yet ready for the larger public domain of the writing class. Neither Bartholomae nor Elbow then, engages with or attends to the story the student is trying to tell.

Bartholomae dismiss the text as overwritten and overdetermined by culture. There is, as he says, no way for student writers to "invent" new ways of talking about family experience. I find Bartholomae's response problematic, however, because it denies the rhetorical relationship between a speaker (in this instance, his student) and the listener (Bartholomae). By being dismissive, Bartholomae in essence stops listening. He ends the rhetorical exchange because he considers the student trapped in language and culturally prescribed ways of seeing herself. However, according to M.M. Bakhtin, all language is always saturated and "populated—overpopulated—with the intentions of others" (294). This doesn't, however, mean that it is futile or pointless to use language. What it does mean is that every speaker in every situation, including both the student and Bartholomae, tries to make language his or her own. Given the social nature of language, there is no way for *any* writer to "invent" new ways of talking. Implicit in Bartholomae's critique is the belief that he has a way of talking and thinking that exists outside of the

overdetermined language of his student. But how can Bartholomae's critique or solution exist outside of that system? In other words, Bartholomae's student, her class, and Bartholomae himself, all reside within this always already written culture. Isn't Bartholomae's critically dismissive script as much culturally written as the student's family script?

And yet Elbow's silence is just as problematic as Bartholomae's dismissal. If Elbow chooses not to respond because the personal narrative is considered too personal, then his decision rests on an assumption about the personal that also needs to be questioned. On one hand, to respond by not responding can be seen as a form of validation. In other words, Elbow is not out to deny or challenge the student's story. On the other hand, however, the decision to not respond is a form of silencing that implicitly suggests that particular personal narratives are more appropriate—and that certain self presentations are more classroom ready—than others. It is a kind of silence that risks silencing the writer herself.

In different ways, both Bartholomae's dismissal and Elbow's silence neglect the student's attempt to write a relational narrative. The point is not to look for "new ways" of writing about the family, but to look closely at *how* students write about family. Instead of dismissing student essays about family as "inconsequential," as Bartholomae does, or responding by not responding, as Elbow seems to, we need to reconsider narratives about family as important documents of a relational self.

This chapter examines student essays written about one of the most common—and most "personal" subjects—the family. Poised on the threshold between childhood and adulthood, between home and school, it is not surprising that many first-year writers

explore family experiences. In fact, Paula Salvio has called student autobiography "threshold autobiography" because the writer "inscribes into the curriculum her process of becoming" (288). Writing about family members is also common in published autobiography, and Paul John Eakin uses the term "relational narratives" to describe texts where the decisive impact on the writer is that of either a social environment or institution—such as a family, school, or church—or one where other individuals—usually family members—play a significant role in the text (69). I'd like to use Eakin's definition of relational narratives to explain how students' self-representation involves a complex negotiation between self and other.

In many ways both the personal essay and the family seem to reside in what might be called a private sphere. And yet both are subjects for continual public scrutiny and critique—whether it is debating the curriculum of first-year writing courses in academic circles or decrying the loss of "family values" in the mass media. When students write about family in a writing class, they are exploring the ways in which the personal intersects with the public. In other words, I don't think personal essays about the family need to be considered private. In fact, a view of the nuclear family as a private and natural situation has been deconstructed by feminist theorists such as Anne McClintock who argue that the idea of "the family" is a construction rather than a natural arrangement. [3]The family itself exists in the realm of the private and domestic, but as also

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[3] With the advent of social Darwinism, the mid nineteenth century saw the notion of "family" used in two distinct ways. On one hand, the family operated as a metaphor—the "family of man"—to consolidate (and normalize) a narrative of racial and sexual hierarchies. This narrative served to naturalize the story of history and empire for Victorian England. On the other hand, the family as an institution became "void of history" and was figured as "existing, naturally, beyond the commodity market, beyond politics and beyond history proper." By imagining the family as "natural," McClintock

an institution that is clearly marked, and demarcated by, questions of culture, class, race, and gender. Personal essays about family then, are more than just private stories about relatives. By writing about family, students explore the social relationships that create families, as well as the codes, conducts, and silences that regulate, normalize, and control them.

Intersubjectivity: The Relational Self

Feminist psychoanalytic theorist Jessica Benjamin's notion of intersubjectivity provides a framework for reading and conceptualizing the relational dimension of selfhood. In *The Bonds of Love*, Benjamin explores the ways that traditional psychoanalysis has tended to frame the individual as a "closed system." Freud's focus on the ego and subsequent theories of the individual psyche highlight the "intrapsychic" dimensions of a self that is focused inward, that is private, and that needs to see itself as separate from an "other," rather than in relation to this "other." In contrast, Benjamin explores the relationships *between* the individual—the self—and the other. While Benjamin does not reject the Freudian conception of the self, she claims we need to balance that view of the intrapsychic self with the "interpsychic" self. That is, in any consideration of self formation the ways in which individuals negotiate relationships with an other needs to be considered. Her theory of intersubjectivity is a model of the individual that takes into account the experience of "being with" an other, rather than reducing or destroying the other in order to assert one's self. The intersubjective view, as

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argues that the family became "both the antithesis of history and history's organizing figure" (44).

Benjamin explains, "maintains that the individual grows in and through the relation to other subjects" (19-20). The self needs the other in order to be recognized and to confirm a sense of self.

Central to a theory of intersubjectivity is the recognition that the other is also a self. This is what Benjamin calls "mutual recognition," and it depends upon a simultaneous need for recognition by the other, as well as independence from the other. The individual, then, must maintain this tension between self-assertion and mutual recognition. The paradox of mutual recognition is that the other subject is needed, yet exists beyond one's control. "To embrace this paradox," writes Benjamin, "is the first step toward unraveling the bonds of love. This means not to undo our ties to others but rather to disentangle them; to make of them not shackles but circuits of recognition" (221). Benjamin's theory of intersubjectivity provides an important intervention into the notion of the self as an autonomous entity and provides the necessary framework for looking at the relationships between self and other that are enacted in student texts about family members. Kim Worthington incorporates this view of intersubjectivity in *Self as Narrative: Subjectivity and Community in Contemporary Fiction.* Subjectivity, writes Worthington, "is understood to derive from intersubjectivity. That is, our conceptions of selfhood are deemed to be constituted by, not merely reflected in, the terms of language which is social and public" (5). By viewing the self as relational and embedded in particular "circuits of recognitions," it is possible to rethink personal writing as a mode of writing that "acts within the world." The remainder of this chapter examines how student writers represent the "other" in their text and how they negotiate their identity in relation to this other.

Lies

In the essay "Reflections" (1993), Elise Ann Morrissey describes the routine visits she makes with her father to visit her grandmother in the nursing home. Elise uses the present tense and telling details to create a convincing nursing home scene in which she raises important questions about aging and family relationships. Here she describes her arrival at the nursing home with her father:

> The lobby of the nursing home is very pleasant, so much nicer than its third floor. The featherweight sounds of "easy listening favorites" drift down from the ceiling and tickle my eardrums. As we walk toward the front desk, I spot a considerably large glass box in the distance reflecting the bright fluorescent lights of the hall. "Good evening, Sister," my father says to the woman at the front desk as he signs in. "Why don't you sign in too, Lovadova." Dad forgets how embarrassing it is when he calls me that in public. I smile at the nun as I reach for a pen. I write down "6:15" for time of arrival and observe that only two visitors had come today; one at 10:40 and the other at 1:00. My father has already filled out our time of departure—6:30. (73)

This passage, the second paragraph of the essay, establishes three important points. The first is that Elise has a close relationship with her father as evidenced by his nickname for her (a nickname that that he good-naturedly uses even though it embarrasses her). Secondly, we also learn that they are only the third visitors of the entire day—these nursing home patients spend a lot of time alone. But perhaps the most telling detail is that before they have even commenced their visit, Elise's father has determined its duration. He plans to spend fifteen minutes with his mother and, by filling in their time of departure, he has secured the brief parameters of his perfunctory visit. This highlights the difference between those who live in the home and those who visit. It also highlights the tension that will gradually emerge for Elise as she attempts to negotiate her own connections between these two family members.

Elise continues in paragraph three to slowly and carefully take her readers with her as she moves towards her grandmother's new home:

> We walk out of the elevator and onto the shiny white linoleum of the third floor. The air is stale and compressed. I hear the squeaks of nurses' shoes as they roll carts stacked with the empty dinner trays. I catch a glimpse of green jello with the remnants of its well-appreciated whipped cream on the top. A nurse picks up a forgotten pair of dentures from one of the trays, and shaking her head, walks back to one of the rooms to return it.
>
> We start our journey to my grandmother's room. The walls of the corridor are lined with residents in their wheelchairs. I can't help but make eye contact with some and smile politely while trying not to notice that their arms are contorted and their mouths are wide open. For my smile I receive only blank stares. "How did this happen to these people?" I wonder as I secretly thank God that I'm still young. I can hear clips of Tom Brokaw, Alex Tribek, and John Tesh coming from the televisions of the rooms we pass, but there are no conversations. (73)

The specific details of the white linoleum, the stale air, the glimpse of jello, and the dentures conjure up the sterility and loneliness of old age homes. These are places where we put our own, that function as holding cells of one sort or another and where, as Elise has noted, few people visit and if they do, they don't stay for long. They are also places where once productive people have been reduced to a state of dependence and are treated like forgetful children. By narrating the story of visiting her grandmother, Elise also explores the rituals of displacement that accompany growing old in our country—"*How did this happen to these people*?" Elise's essay looks at the ways in which nursing homes are cultural spaces that reside in the background and yet often define many families.

At the center of Elise's essay are two important moments where she digresses from the present tense—the first is an act of imagination and the second is a memory. Observing her grandmother's sleeping roommate she writes:

> I look over at the photograph of my grandmothers' roommate on the wall. She had had rosy cheeks and a bright, beautiful smile; she

> looked like a loving mother. I watch her while she sleeps. She tosses and turns and murmurs to herself, a weak resemblance of the woman on the wall. I wonder if she's dreaming of the joyful days when she could take care of her husband, children, and house; now her husband is dead, her kids have their own children, and the house has been taken over by a happy, younger family. Now she can't even get out of bed to wipe the dust off of her picture. (74)

Elise has suddenly shifted from her observer stance and through an imagined digression attempts to fill in the missing details of this woman's absent life. Cued by the phrase, "I wonder," the brief digression is brought to an end with the grim reality that the photographs themselves are coated in dust, a sure sign of decay and disuse.

The imaginative digression is followed by a flashback as Elise describes visiting her grandmother's home when she was a little girl:

> I think back to Grammy's apartment, the only home I've known her to inhabit. The kitchen table that was always filled with our favorite junk food and grandmother's poems on the magnets on her refrigerator. The reclining chair in the corner of her living room that my brother and I always raced to sit in. Her secretary stood in the other corner; through the glass doors you could see her collection of miniature bears and gifts the grandchildren made for her. In the bedroom her bureau held beautiful brushes and mirrors and puff powder with which we always dusted our noses during sleepovers. In one of the top drawers we were always sure to find miniature presents from the "five and dime" store. I was never tall enough to see inside the drawer, so whatever I fished out was an exhilarating surprise. Grammy had a Chinese fortune telling book on her bedside table. There was never anything in that book about the room in which she sits now; hospital bars on the sides of the bed and her name taped to her old alarm clock. (74)

These two digressions throw the sterility and silence of the third floor into stark contrast with the imagined and remembered domestic spaces of both of these elderly women. A central theme in this essay is the blurred boundaries and intersections between the private and public, and the ways each is made visible in the nursing home. The photographs of her grandmother's roommate and her own memories of her grandmother's apartment link these women to private, domestic spaces. By juxtaposing these imagined and

remembered spaces with the institutional sterility and crushing loneliness of the age-old home, Elise's essay looks at how the boundaries that so often define family and home are actually fragile and permeable.

The subject position of this personal essay is clearly that of Elise, the topic however is not. Throughout most of the essay, Elise assumes the stance of an observer. When her grandmother tells her that she wants to go home, Elise's stance undergoes a significant transformation. She writes: "Why do you want to go home, Grammy? It's so nice here. You get your meals brought to you, you get to go to arts & crafts, you get to be with a lot of people," I say as cheerfully as possible" (75). This creates an interesting tension for the reader as we witness Elise's own sense of being complicit in her grandmother's situation and in the ritual of soothing her. As her readers we have watched Elise carefully establish the sterility of the food, the absence of activity in the hallways, and the silence—other than the television—that is the hallmark of the place itself. Part of the power of this essay is its ability to show the gap between the words Elise tells her grandmother and what she experiences as a visitor. Her words to her grandmother are emptied of meaning for both her reader and herself because they contradict everything she has seen. Like her father who pushes the wheel chair, and the nurse who returns the forgotten dentures, Elise subtly grapples with her own part in her grandmother's story. However, unlike her father (whose actions suggest a desire to leave this place as soon as possible—to separate both from the institution and his mother), Elise *examines* the connections between her own sense of self and her grandmother. For this reason, this move of self-implication is crucial as Elise attempts to understand herself in

relation to both her father and her grandmother. Caught between two generations, she is connected to both.

The essay ends with Elise and her father taking her grandmother for a walk down the hall. At the end of the hall, Elise realizes that the bright lights are a large cage for tropical birds:

> Almost a dozen birds and tall branches fill the space. Yellow, blue, brown, red, and green, zipping from the ground to the top of the branch, to the feeder, to the nest. They are silent birds, for the glass is too thick for us to hear their chirping and their flapping wings. They don't notice us. We are witnessing them in a cage before us, but they are really in a big beautiful forest. All three of us are staring at this glass cage that holds these lively birds, but I am the only one not smiling. (75)

By making the comparison between the birds housed in the cage and the elderly women of the third floor whose rooms are littered with remnants of their former vital selves, Elise's essay raises questions about what it means to grow old and what it means to be part of a family. Her father's desire to flee the nursing home is in many ways a flight from the material reality and conditions of his mother and her new "home." In contrast, Elise's choice of present tense and her descriptions highlight—in fact *linger over*—the very real and present materiality of this experience. Her move of self-implication demonstrates that her sense of self is deeply connected to the stories of the "others" of which she writes.

What, I wonder, would Bartholomae make of this essay? Would he dismiss it because it is culturally written? My hunch is that Bartholomae would ask Elise to consider the larger social situation of nursing homes within American culture—the history, economics, and sociology of this hidden space. And yet, what is so effective about Elise's essays is that by drawing on her personal experience, she is able to raise these questions in the minds of her reader without explicitly writing about them.

Consider, for example, the final words of her essay—"but I am the only one not smiling." This is a pivotal turn in her essay and one that reveals Elise's position in regards to her grandmother, her father, and to the nursing home. She does not wrap everything up for her readers with a neat bow in order to present a finished or resolved essay. In fact, her last few words re-open the essay by highlighting her own awareness. These last words speak directly to Elise's readers as she reconsiders a place that, for many of us, is often hidden from view. In other words, she takes as her subject a cultural commonplace—the nursing home—but by writing about her personal experience she also raises questions about social practices. Elise's essay is a study of self-representation that considers the self *in relation to* a significant other, as well as in relation to the world she lives in. Elise moves between the individual and the social in her consideration of home and family relationships. In effect, she is able to use her self as a tool to "cut into the real" (Probyn 135) to examine the relationships *between* her self and her grandmother, as well as between her self and larger social issues of aging and displacement.

In an essay entitled "The One-Eyed Man" (2002), Mason Cole also explores his sense of self in relation to a significant other—his dying grandfather. However, unlike Elise who examines her sense of connection with her grandmother, Mason's connection is clearly marked by the threat of contamination. Mason writes about his fear of his grandfather, but he also writes about his fear of inheriting his grandfather's Alzheimer's disease. His essay opens with the line "You can't escape who your ancestors were" (71), and his first few paragraphs are a meditation on the more positive and common notions of inheritance in terms of one's physical features and adult identity. For instance, Mason is

comforted by the idea of his Native American ancestors accompanying him on his long runs and writes that "[i]t was a comfort to know that when other children abandoned me at school for reading too much or being too smart, there was a group of people (long gone, but people, nonetheless) who stood by me because I had parts of them inside me. Their spirits were a comfort" (71).

The *ethos* that Mason establishes in this essay, however, suggests an increasingly weary and cynical perspective as he describes his gradual realization of the double edged sword that ancestry has come to represent for him. Where once Mason found comfort in the knowledge that his ancestors accompanied him—when his own peers did not—he now rejects any notion of ancestry as romantic, idyllic, or easy. It is his visit to his dying grandfather in the veteran's medical care facility in Norman, Oklahoma that changes his perspective:

> I wished for a book on every trip to the room. I read the instructions on the bed; I read the warning labels on the medical equipment. I tried to ground myself in the comforting reality of words. I knew that if I looked directly into his eyes, I would begin to imagine myself in his place, just as I always did with the other patients in the corridor...
>
> After a while, when my grandmother and father had received a faint spark of recognition (or what passed for one), they would tell me about their cherished memories of the mentally dear departed who left his living body behind. Mason, you should have been there on our wedding day. He made such a handsome figure. Oh, look at him, he's still moving his feet to the music playing on the radio; he was a marvelous dancer. When I was your age, Son, my father took me to Oklahoma football games like the one we're going to today. He once bought us scalped tickets on the day of the game, not a cheap proposition, so I could see the Sooners play Nebraska. And to serve his country in the Air Force for a quarter century, fixing planes with his natural mechanical genius...what a man. A better husband there never was. A better father never lived.
>
> It made me nauseous. I never doubted the truth of their memories, but still I knew that they were living in a fantasy world. The only things they remembered about this man were those that made him out to be a

> hero, the easiest kind of selective memory to have. At his bedside, he was the only diapered king in the world. (73)

Mason describes his desire to read everything in the hospital—to find the "comforting reality of words"—which are straightforward and clear in order to avoid reading his grandfather's face. His grandfather remains an inscrutable text because his body is wasting away from dementia, but also because he knows very little about this man. Where Elise writes about her own degree of complicity, Mason struggles with the cost of such connections to this significant other.

Mason's grandmother and father tell stories designed to give him a family history and to provide another possibility for a grandfather other than the inert form in the hospital bed. However, as Mason writes:

> But outside the room, I heard other stories. My grandfather may have been all that they said, but he was much more. Isn't everybody? He had been an alcoholic, and although I can't remember ever hearing about him beating my father, my uncle, or my grandmother, there were times when such a thing was darkly hinted at. He wasn't a brilliant man—he started out several grades ahead of my grandmother in school, but they graduated in the same class, nevertheless. He attended the local Methodist church and was a member, but never let anyone know his beliefs in matters of faith. (73)

In this passage, Mason attempts to deconstruct the stories he hears by listening for what is not said but exists between the lines. Rather than building his grandfather up, Mason seems determined to portray as many sides of this man as he can.

This essay shows Mason's attempt to come to terms with the conflicting stories about his grandfather. As he writes, "But I really have no truth about him." When his grandfather dies, Mason writes a poem that is printed on the funeral program:

> It was so flowery that even Hallmark would insist it be rewritten. I hated it, because it didn't describe my actual feelings about the guest of honor—it showed him as I had never known him, as a man. Everyone else loved it. "How beautiful," they said. "You do remember him. What a

> sweet tribute." It made me feel like the worst kind of liar. They were accepting my fiction as their truth. (74)

As a writer, Mason he is well aware of the rhetorical demands of a eulogy and writes what family members read as a "sweet tribute." Writing itself is significant to Mason and his essay becomes a meditation on narrative identity as he witnesses how his grandfather's life is (re)established through stories and memories of others. However, his essay raises questions about the ways that both writing and storytelling shape family memories. Where earlier he had sought refuge in the solidity and reality of words, this faith gradually crumbles as he describes his own contribution to the multiple stories about his grandfather which leaves him feeling like the "worst kind of liar." In fact, his essay becomes a testament to the fact that words themselves are not inherently solid or true, but malleable and unstable.

Mason's essay is about connection and relationship, but it is also about the uneasy legacy of what such connections mean. In one sense, there is a fear of contamination underlying Mason's essay. As Jessica Benjamin puts it, "the world exposes us to the different others who, not only in their mere existence as separate beings reflect our lack of control, but who also threaten to evoke in us what we have repudiated in order to protect the self: weakness, vulnerability, decay" (95). For Mason, there is so much that is unknown—from the gene that carry's his grandfather's disease to the life his grandfather lived. Intersubjectivity does not necessarily need to be about the positive elements of connection, but it does provide a way of theorizing how selves negotiate this interpsychic space between the self and the other. Perhaps in the act of writing, Mason is able to control the conditions of both his grandfather and his fear of inheritance.

The criticism of student essays suggests that the "master narrative" of family culturally determines the stories they are able to tell. Yet while both Mason and Elise write about nursing homes and a relationship with a grandparent, the contrast between their experiences couldn't be more pronounced. Each writer enters into familiar territory, but negotiates their experience and sense of self in different and distinct ways.

Secrets

In the essay "Portrait of a Family" (1997), Katherine Harvell writes about the role that family photo albums play in defining families. In particular, she considers the ways that photos both reveal and conceal certain stories. Leafing through a collection of photo-albums that are a collage of years and images in no particular order, Katherine is not able to discern a theme in these family archives until she notices the absence of her Uncle Ray. As the live-in partner of John, her father's older brother, Ray had become part of Katherine's family. Her essay comments on the fact that while everyone considers Ray a part of the family, there was very little photographic proof of him at all:

> Had you asked any of the grandchildren whether Ray was a member of their family, they would have answered without hesitation, "Yes, he's my Uncle Ray." But family portraits told a different story. For those, he was always on the other side of the camera. It was his job to take the picture, to capture the moments in the lives of this happy yet incomplete family. Incomplete because it didn't always include him, a friend and caring man. Big brown eyes atop a tall slender frame, he was a welcome figure to the grandchildren, a favorite playmate. Blood ran through his veins, but it wasn't Harvell blood. And though many of us considered him part of the family, he couldn't wear a wedding band and wasn't to be included in the documentation of family gatherings. (23-34)

Katherine is writing out of, and back to, a tacit family silence and secrecy regarding her uncle's homosexuality and the existence of Ray, his life partner. Her essay becomes a meditation on the rituals that constitute families and the ways in which photographs work

to re-affirm who is included and, as she discovers, who is not. As the photographer, Uncle Ray makes these monuments to the family possible, yet he is a threat to the very stability and story that these photographs tell. The family photo albums simultaneously create and define the boundaries of family, and to be in the picture is to be in the family. In her personal essay, Katherine "reads" these photographs as family artifacts and assumes the role of interpreter. What she discovers is how insidious homophobia is, how silent its assertion, and the ways that her family has maintained certain secrets.

In addition to the marked absence of Ray, Katherine also notices the abrupt end of photographs of her uncle John who died of AIDS in 1993. The discovery of these two absences structures the first half of the essay. In the second half, Katherine describes the day of her aunt's wedding and the ensuing group photographs:

> Uncle Ray lifted the first camera. "Here we go. Is everybody ready?" He began taking pictures with everyone's cameras. Nobody could resist the old "take a step back" joke because Ray stood so close to the pool. He responded by teasingly putting his foot dangerously close to the edge. The very last camera was, as always, my grandfather's. The picture taken with it became the official documentation of this or any other family gathering. As my uncle lifted the camera and began to adjust it, my grandfather called out that he wanted at least six pictures. Ray smiled and took the first one. But after the first shot my grandfather did something that took me totally by surprise. Maybe he had become enlightened, maybe he was just in an expansive mood. But he got out of his chair and went over to Ray.
>
> "Here, I'll take the pictures, you get in the shot." He had said the words I never thought I'd hear. I'm not sure my uncle believed it at first. Maybe it was because my grandfather had just seen his only daughter married or maybe he wanted to replace his lost son. But at that moment I knew Ray was finally part of this family and would always be. My dad was calling him over, and as Ray ran to take his place next to my father, he was smiling from ear to ear. And everyone was smiling back at him, only this time he was smiling on this side of the camera. (25)

Katherine captures the friendly chaos of a family function, including the easy camaraderie between her uncle Ray and everyone else. Even though she has detected what she sees as an erasure from the family in photo albums, her experience in the family continues with ceremonies, laughter, and, of course, photographs. Katherine spends a great deal of time building up to her grandfather's decision to let Ray be in the picture, a turning point witnessed by the author, but not of her own making. As she considers this seemingly small gesture, Katherine speculates on its origin: "Maybe he had become enlightened, maybe he was just in an expansive mood...maybe he wanted to replace his lost son." The interpretive project that she began by reading family snapshots has been carried over to reading her family as they come together as a group. In her careful description of this familiar scene, she reveals how families can conceal and silence, as well as how they can change.

In *Family Secrets: Acts of Memory and Imagination*, Annette Kuhn calls the exploration of personal artifacts such as memories and photographs "memory work" (9). As a critical practice, memory work "makes it possible to explore connections between 'public' historical events, structures of feeling, family dramas, relations of class, national identity, and gender, and 'personal' memory" (5). Memory texts are interpretations of events, moments, and people. As such, they are important documents to examine because they often reveal how what is personal is always part of a larger cultural fabric of meaning. Memory work, then, undercuts any assumptions about the transparency of what is remembered. Rather than "truth," memory work is based on texts that act as evidence and material to be interrogated and interpreted. Remembering itself is always

already an act of "secondary revision" in that it is at a remove from the experience or event itself.

Kuhn's terms "memory work" and "memory texts" provide an additional critical vocabulary to use when discussing students' personal essays. If we see the material that writers draw from as open to multiple possibilities and meanings–and not as texts that are fixed or unmediated—then writing from memory forms another level of interpretation. Like Eakin's concept of "narrative identity," self-narratives become not simple recordings of past experiences, but are bound up in questions of interpretation. Katherine's essay about the absence of her Uncle Ray echoes precisely what Kuhn seems to be thinking about:

> family photographs may affect to show us our past, but what we do with them—how we use them—is really about today, not yesterday. These traces of our former lives are pressed into service in a never-ending process of making, re-making, making sense of, our selves—now. (19)

The family photo album is an important artifact in the cultural construction of family. The choice of what pictures belong and how they are arranged are, according to Kuhn, "culturally speaking, rather circumscribed" (20). It is *how* we interrogate, interpret, and read these photos and memory texts that is important. In Katherine's essay, for example, she links together three photographic instances in order to shape a narrative about both her family and herself. The first is the absence of pictures of Ray, the second is the sudden end of pictures of her uncle, and the third is the experience of watching her grandfather suddenly intervene into her family's photographic history. Katherine uses the photographs as texts that require interpretation and that do not necessarily speak for themselves. Her essay is also about the ways that personal narratives can do the work of revision and in her case she revises Uncle Ray's story of exclusion by exposing it. The

family photo album is a testament to the ways in which "memory texts" shape the stories we tell. In other words, Katherine's personal essay is not only about her self, but it is about how she understands her self in relation to the story of her family.

Silence

If Katherine's essay reveals the ways in which families conceal secrets, Rebecca Lesiak's essay considers the effect of a family silence. In the essay "Infinity Isn't Always Forever" (1999), Rebecca describes the last time she saw her father, on her tenth birthday, and how his absence in her life has shaped her as a young adult:

> He always knew what was going on in my life then: what new friends I'd made in school, how my mom had taken me to the circus, how I beat up the neighborhood bully after she hit me in the knees with a baseball bat. Today, he has no idea where I am or what I'm doing. He doesn't know that I'm a biology major at Boston College, or that I graduated fourth in my high school class. He doesn't know how, while filling out college applications, I had to write "unknown" in the "father's information" section, nor that I wasn't even curious about the information that should have gone in those blank spaces. (28-29)

In this passage Rebecca speaks to a double silence that structures both her life and her essay. She lacks basic information about her father, such as where he lives and what he does. But in writing her personal essay, Rebecca re-reads (and revises) these huge silences in relation to her father to point out all that he does not know about *her*:

> My mother always asked whether it bothered me that I didn't have a father, and I always said no. And meant it. I listen to other girls' memories of their fathers, how their daddies would take them fishing on Sundays, teach them how to throw a softball, and when they got older, mercilessly grill any poor boy that wanted to take them out on a date. My memories of my father consist of waiting quietly in my room while my mother and father fought on Saturday mornings, receiving presents that I didn't want, and crying hysterically when my mother had to go out and he was the only person who could baby-sit for me. I'd rather have these

> memories, though, than have gotten attached to a man who would hit his wife or drive drunk time after time and skip his court appearances. I'd rather have listened to my mother yell at him once a week for missed child support payments than have caught and killed fish or pierced a live worm with a small silver hook and spilled worm innards on my hands. I'd rather have cried night after night than gotten scraped knees and black eyes from playing softball. I'll gladly give up an interrogation session with a potential boyfriend in exchange for a burlap-framed poem. (29-30)

Rebecca invokes "other girls' memories" to show, once again, the stark difference between the idealized version of fathers and her own experience. Rebecca's father is a marked absence in her life, as evidenced by her choice to write about it. However, in the act of writing, she seems able to define, establish, and acknowledge this silence on her own terms. The autobiographical act, as Eakin writes "affords the opportunity to speak the previously unspoken, to reveal what has been hidden or repressed" (87). However, unlike the significant others that Elise and Mason write about, Rebecca has to negotiate her sense of self in relation to an absent and silent other. In this essay Rebecca revises both her "memory text" and the history of her father's silence in order to establish a sense of self that seems strong and healthy.

Loss

Student writers often choose to write about the loss of a family member, a choice that has caused a great deal of anxious debate in the field of composition. How does one grade a paper about the death of a loved one? How does one suggest revisions or changes? However, student writers often use these essays as an occasion to create a space for acknowledging and articulating this loss. Concerns about assessing or revising these texts miss the opportunity to see how writers use this occasion, and the many ways these writers are already engaged in the work of revision. Paula Salvio examines the role

that loss and grieving play in writing pedagogy and suggests an approach to remembering that can create "exchanges between" the writer and their subject. Through acts of reading and writing, students can "learn how loss can acquire meaning, and potentially generate recovery, not of the departed, but of herself, as the person who remembers" (113). In this last section I look at how the personal essay provides an opportunity for the "person who remembers" to negotiate a sense of self in relation to the loss of a significant other.

In the essay, "My Brother, the Fighter" (1993), writer K.M. Marley writes about the death of his older brother, Mickey, to AIDS. Published under a pseudonym, K. frames his essay with a scene at Mickey's funeral where he is surrounded by his three remaining older brothers. The body of his essay moves back in time through flashbacks in order to describe the early sense of awe and admiration that he had felt for his older brother. Once a professional kick boxer, Mickey fell into steroid and cocaine use before his father sent him to rehab. K often uses direct address to convey information about Mickey: "One thing you must understand about my brother is his amazing abilities with women; I mean women loved this guy...I thought he was the greatest person alive, and I think he was really happy that I looked up to him" (65).

One of the dominant themes to emerge in K's essay is his own inability to face the fact that Mickey's death meant the loss of his childhood hero. In fact, there is a great deal in this essay about K's inability to speak and to acknowledge that Mickey is dying. Here K describes the experience of seeing Mickey working at McDonalds:

> And there he was, behind the counter at McDonald's. He looked different, kind of skinny, and he had these marks on his arms. I didn't mention his awkward appearance and we just talked for a while. I didn't realize it then, but I don't think I had ever seen my brother as humiliated

> as he was that night. I mean here was this guy who I thought was the greatest, working at McDonald's. (65-66)

K's essay describes two very different "Mickeys" in order to show the stark contrast between his memory of his brother as a star athlete and ladies' man, and the drug addict working at the local fast food restaurant. K's inability to talk about Mickey is echoed in his inability to find the words to talk with his father:

> Some time later my dad told me that Mickey had AIDS. He wasn't sure if it was from his drug use or his sexual habits, but one thing was for sure, he had AIDS and was going to die—soon. My dad cried a little while he told me, and I wanted to hug him but I didn't. I wanted to let my dad know I loved him, but for some reason I couldn't. I was shocked; I couldn't believe it; I didn't know what to think. (66)

One can read this essay as a moving eulogy to Mickey. And while it certainly is that, it is also an essay about the possibilities and problems of talking with an "other." K's essay itself is full of conversational elements, from his consistent use of dialogue and direct address, to his conversational pace and tone. Mickey spends almost three years in and out of the hospital, and K admits that he never once visited him. In writing this essay, K is able to revise Mickey's story into one of courage, but he is also able to revise his own story about not having the right words into one where he finally does.

One of the hallmarks of narrative is that it involves multiple acts of interpretation as writers interpret past events in order to provide present meaning. In constructing a narrative identity, writers create a sense of self that is revisable, but also readable. In other words, they create a sense of self that is fluid and malleable, but still makes sense. However, what we choose to remember, and how we choose to tell the story of our memories, involves interpretive work. Annette Kuhn writes:

> For the practioner of memory work, it is not merely a question of what we choose to keep in our 'memory boxes'—which particular traces of our

> past we lovingly or not so lovingly preserve—but of what we do with them, how we use these relics to make memories, and how we then make use of the stories they generate to give deeper meaning to, and if necessary to change, our lives today. (158)

K uses his memories of Mickey to reframe them and to put the disturbing images into a context of courage and strength. Writing about death, according to de Certeau, is an act of writing about what is 'unnamable." For as de Certeau writes, "[t]exts proliferate around this wound of reason. Once again, it supports itself on what cannot be mentioned" (192). At the center of K's text is the unspeakable and unnamable loss of his brother. And yet writing itself, as de Certeau explains, presupposes a kind of loss: "Why write, if not in the name of an impossible speech? At the beginning of writing, there is a loss" (195). Writing is always inadequate to the task it sets out to achieve and the writer, as de Certeau claims, "is also a dying man who is trying to speak" (198).

If we begin with the premise that language is saturated and that writing itself entails loss, then what? Do we dismiss student texts about family members because of this, as Bartholomae does? Or does it raise the stakes for how teachers read these narratives? De Certeau claims that "we never write on a blank page, but always on one that has already been written on" (43). While this would seem to echo Bartholomae, de Certeau continues:

> the death that cannot be said can be written and find a language, even though, in this work of expenditure, the need constantly returns, the need to possess through the voice, to deny the limit imposed by the uncrossable space articulating two different presences, to be blinded by knowledge to the fragility that every place's relation with others establishes. (195)

What is important in this passage is that writing can only ever be an attempt. Language itself is imprecise and inadequate, but it is all there is. What counts is that narrative tries to reach across the space that exists between self and other. Relationships are central

then, not just in terms of subject matter, but because narratives need and depend on the presence of an other who will receive and listen to the message being sent. The problem with Bartholomae's dismissal is that not only does he effectively shut down the rhetorical relationship, but he also fails to acknowledge how his student is a writer trying to bridge a space of separation that is ultimately unbridgeable. That writing entails a loss and that language is inadequate are the given conditions. What is necessary is the attempt itself.

The essays in this chapter all explore a sense of self in relation to a significant other. A few of these writers, such as Mason and Rebecca, consider the negative aspects of relational identity. Others writers such as Elise and K explore more positive elements of connection. However, as examples of "relational" narratives, all of these personal essays disrupt any sense of a solitary "I" in their examination of an identity that is deeply interconnected with an other.

As I read through the collection of *Fresh Ink* I noticed the striking absence of one kind of "other." And that was the mother. This absence echoes a similar suppression of mothers in published autobiographies, what literary critic Shirley Neuman calls the "suppression of the maternal body." According to Neuman, mothers tend to be seen as so self-sacrificing and selfless, that part of the precondition for "public" life has been to suppress her (76). In other words, mothers are absent because they are so present and so taken for granted. The majority of student essays that I have read are relational narratives in their consideration of a self and other. However, most often the other they write about is absent, distant, or lost.

In their essays about family, student writers directly engage with lies, secrets, silence, and death. They read their experiences with both a critical and compassionate eye. Probyn explains, "[s]peaking the self does not necessarily imply any triumphant move; rather as a theoretical level, the self may simply and quietly enable yet more questions, more theoretical work" (106). We can take from these essays ways of looking at the self, ways of reading the selves that students produce, and ways of talking about the nature of self that do not result in the dismissal of these essays but that consider the revisionary potential of narrative identity. From aging to AIDS, abandonment to loss, these student writers explore selves in relation to significant others, as well as to significant matters in the world. They use the personal narrative to reflect, examine, and interrogate their sense of self, even as they often demonstrate their awareness that language is an inadequate tool, but one that offers the potential to revise both self and story.

CHAPTER V

WRITING HOME:

IDENTITY, PLACE, AND RHETORICS OF BELONGING

The search for homeplace is the mythical search for the axis mundi, for a center, for some place to stand, for something to hang on to.

--Lucy Lippard, *The Lure of the Local*

Recent theoretical work on *ethos* has articulated a close connection between ideas of place and personal identity. Nedra Reynolds, for instance, writes that *ethos* can "open up more *spaces* in which to study writers' subject positions" (emphasis added, 326). Susan Jarratt writes that *ethos* is a theory of positionality and that this "positioning is a constant awareness that one always speaks from a particular *place* in a social structure" (emphasis added, 47). *Ethos*, according to Karen LeFevre "appears in the socially created *space*, in the 'between,' the point of intersection between speaker or writer and listener and reader" (emphasis added, 45-46). This emphasis on space and place focuses on where a writer is "coming from," where they are located, and in some sense, where they feel they belong. This view of *ethos*, then, takes into consideration questions of class, race, gender, and geography.

This is a compelling view for considering student texts that are, literally, about a question of place and home. The idea of home connotes both a physical sense of place (a street address), as well as a community to which you belong (a "hometown"). Home is often cast in a nostalgic way, but home, as these student narratives attest to, is a far more contradictory and contested place. In particular, I am interested in how students write

about home communities—and the rituals of belonging to them—from the new location of the academic institution. Individuals, as Jerome Bruner writes, "rarely owe allegiance to any single institution: one "belongs" to a family of origin and one by marriage, an occupational group, a neighborhood, as well as to more general groups like a nation or a social class" (30). Negotiating among these multiple and often contradictory communities involves conflicts of interest, as well as of identities. How do student writers represent these conflicts? How do student writers establish belonging?

Students' personal essays may pose a unique challenge to ideas of *ethos* grounded in ideas of place and location because they often reside in a liminal space between home and school, between adolescence and adulthood. Their self-narratives investigate this condition of being "in-between"—what postcolonial theorist Homi K. Bhabha calls "liminality." Bhabha defines liminality as the moments that are "produced in the articulation of cultural differences" and on how these "'in-between' spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood—singular or communal—that initiate new signs of identity" (1332). This understanding of the "in- between" spaces is useful in thinking about the ways that student writers represent their home within the institutional space of the university. While many students write about a liminal condition, as undergraduates within the hierarchy of a college institution, almost all of them write from a liminal position.

This chapter examines student essays about home. My interest is not so much the location of home, but in how students represent it in their writing and how they understand their sense of identity in relation to both place and community. Central to my

thinking is the recent work by cultural geographers such as Doreen Massey who view place as "open and porous" rather than static, singular or fixed (5). I use the term community not to signify a particular geographical location or a political group but as a "spatial metaphor" that refers to a shared "discursive space" (Worthington 67). Community in this sense highlights how belonging is always understood in the relationship *between* individuals and groups, as well as *between* people and place. Like geographer George Revill, I use the idea of community in order to examine the "processes that create a sense of stability from a "contested terrain" in which versions of place and notions of identity are supported by different groups and individuals with varying power to articulate their positions" (120). In reading student essays, I have found what I see as three tropes that suggest ways of thinking about identity and place—*trespassing*, *translating*, and *traveling*. These tropes speak to the sense of space and place that writers portray in the ways their narratives create, destroy, or maintain certain kinds of borders and terrains. These terms are also useful for considering the tensions that exist in the liminal space between mobility and staying put, between being an insider and an outsider.

Trespassing

In the essay "A Different Point of View" (1995), a writer identified only by the initials B.G.R. writes about his decision to leave his neighborhood gang, the Martin Street Posse, after witnessing a gang related murder at the age of fifteen. In careful chronology, he details the incidents leading up to the murder, his own escape from the scene of "execution," and his subsequent conversation with his older brother about his

future if he remains in the gang. B.G.R.'s essay explores his own route out of the neighborhood, but also addresses street violence and the problem of viable and available alternatives for the young black men in his neighborhood. While he wants out, the problem was knowing *how* to get out. As he writes, "I never knew anyone who got out of a gang. All I knew was that if you chose to live the lifestyle of a gang member, you died living that life. That was all there was to it, since joining a gang was what most teenagers were doing in my neighborhood. No one chose to advance in their studies or work. That was the condition of my community" (42). B.G.R.'s essay examines both the borders that define place and the codes that determine belonging within a given community. While his essay is about his home neighborhood, it simultaneously engages the more recent membership codes of his new community within Boston College.

Community as an idea and as a place plays a large role in B.G.R.'s essay. In essence, he describes the two very different communities: his neighborhood and Boston College. He demonstrates his knowledge of the communicative strategies of each of these communities through the language he uses. For example, he uses slang and dialect to describe the buildup to the violent confrontation between his own gang and a rival gang: "So we began walking toward them. I could hear my friends verbally preparing themselves. "Man, I don't care. I ain't go be letting nobody walk through our neighborhood like dat. F*** them! I'm ready for anything" (41). His language provides him with rhetorical authority and a kind of authenticity. That is, by quoting his friends he not only proves that he was "there," but that he belonged.

Language also signals B.G.R.'s knowledge of the ways in which the academy itself is another community with specific codes of conduct and rituals for belonging. By

setting the language of his friends off with quotation marks he contains and frames them with language that explains ("So we began walking toward them"), explicates (his friends are "verbally preparing themselves") and sanitizes (F***). He also aligns himself with the conventions of his new community by using a retrospective stance that implies that he is no longer a participant, but has moved to the more distant stance of critic and commentator—a stance far more familiar and comfortable from an academic perspective. I believe these rhetorical moves signal his knowledge of what Lisa Delpit calls the "culture of power." According to Delpit, education in general, and the classroom in particular, reflect tacit codes or practices of the dominant culture that include ways of talking, writing, and presenting a self (282-83). B.G.R. however, uses strategies recognized and validated by the "culture of power" to write about a specific experience which is *outside* of the "culture of power." In other words, B.G.R. describes the experience of navigating in the liminal space that exists between the two communities of home and school. As a result, he finds himself as an outsider in both worlds:

> When I go home now, when I visit from college, I still see my friends. They have gotten worse. Many of them are in jail from drugs. Some have joined ever bigger gangs, and the rest are earning money but are only targets for cops or jealous kids. Deep down inside I know they are good kids because I was there with them from the beginning. It's just that they've never had any role models. Sure, it was nice to see Michael Jordan on television telling kids to say no to drugs, but that wasn't influential enough. We needed someone right there, right then. I didn't have any role models in my city when I was growing up. I didn't want to be like the barber who cut my hair, the corner store owner whom I stole from, or the drug dealers who sold in the front of my house. The only way out I saw was through athletics. My football coach later told me that this choice is limited, just like gangs. I could get hurt. He told me that I should pursue education. You know what? He was right. (43)

B.G.R. occupies the positions of both participant and observer within these different communities, as evidenced by his use of pronouns. He begins by describing his friends

from a vantage point that is outside and uses "they." Half way through this passage, however, he switches to "we," and as a participant vouches that they are "good kids." As an observer, he sees not only the street boundaries established by his gang but the larger boundaries of the neighborhood that are economic, racial, and classed. While his gang can police certain borders to keep others out, there are invisible barriers that keep them in.

The idea of trespassing and the image of borders structure B.G.R.'s essay in important ways. To "trespass" can mean to invade the property, person, or land of another without consent. The gang fight that B.G.R. writes about, for example, is as an act of trespassing by rival gang members. It is a fight, in other words, about the borders that define place and the consequences of straying "out of place." But to "trespass" also means "the transgression of a law, code, or duty" and, in this sense, trespassing means knowing and following the codes of belonging that structure different communities. B.G.R. establishes the ways in which his gang maintained territorial boundaries but he also establishes the codes of conduct for belonging—for instance, the language used by gang members to reinforce their unity and their commitment to border maintenance. In this sense, B.G.R. demonstrates "street literacy"—which suggests that you know your place in the physical sense, but also that you know (and understand) the specific codes of belonging that mark a metaphorical place within a given community (Cahill, cited in Matthews 108).

In many ways, B.G.R. is writing *about* an old liminal place (the Martin Street Posse and their territory) *from* a new liminal place (being in college), so that he is neither fully in his old world nor fully part of this new world. The gang itself exists as a group

that is in between the family and an officially sanctioned adult world. The street, which defines both the territory of the gang and the members themselves, is yet another liminal place. According to sociologist Hugh Matthews, streets are liminal in that they are both a "place of separation and a domain of transition" (102). In the spatial sense, the street exists *between* publicly sanctioned spaces such as stores or malls, and private houses. However, the street also exists in a more metaphorical manner as a "cultural borderland" and as a "thirdspace" that offers a space for teenagers that is in between childhood and adulthood (103-04). The street, then is a place where young people can assume a kind of public identity that is removed from family and other adults. In finding their own place, adolescents actively carve out what Matthews calls "cultural crevices" or "social fissures" which are most often among the forgotten or neglected spaces of adults (106).

B.G.R.'s essay is a complex study of multiple communities and multiple kinds of literacy that work within these separate domains. The idea of a "way out" is a key theme in B.G.R.'s essay as are the ways that borders and boundaries work. The title of this essay, "A Different Point of View" suggests that B.G.R. is writing this essay from, presumably, the other side of "out." In doing so, he is able to offer a different perspective from that of his friends still in the gang at home. In another sense, he may also see himself as outside of the community at BC and that his essay offers a different perspective from that of his new peers. In transporting this story into the classroom, B.G.R. has, in a sense, crossed yet another border by exposing his gang (their words and this fight), to an "outside" audience. The idea of trespassing then takes on multiple connotations in B.G.R.'s essay as a meditation on what it means to stay in one's place, and what it costs to transgress those boundaries.

B.G.R.'s essay is about spatial movement on many different levels. There is, for example, the movement between getting out of the neighborhood versus staying in it, as well as the movement between being an insider as a gang member and an outsider at BC. According to de Certeau, "every story is a travel story—a spatial practice" (115) and almost all narratives are in fact made possible by this contradiction or tension between place and movement. Narratives about place and space invariably involve creating borders that define the inside safe space from the outside "alien" space. De Certeau uses the terms "frontier" to describe the far limits of the "legitimate" space. Frontiers exist as a temporarily created space that separates the known from the unknown, the inner from the outer, and the legitimate from the alien (126). Frontiers, then have a "mediating role" and end up occupying a "space between" what is on either side of the border (127). The interesting paradox, however, is that the borders, in some sense can only be described or known from those who have gone beyond them and have seen them from the other side. It is the bridge—as object and metaphor—thatmakes this movement beyond the borders possible. Bridges, de Certeau explains are "a transgression of the limit, a disobedience of the law of the place" and as such, a bridge "represents a departure, an attack on a state, the ambition of a conquering power, or the flight of an exile; in any case, the "betrayal" of an order" (128). Bridges signal not only the desire but the means by which one can cross out of the known legitimate territory and enter into the unknown space that lies beyond. In other words, bridges offer a way "out" and at the same time offer the possibility of a return.

B.G.R.'s essay describes a world where the known or legitimate space was dictated and determined by his neighborhood gang. The active patrolling of these borders

was, in fact, a key part of membership within them. In B.G.R.'s essay, education operates as the bridge that allows him to travel into, and beyond, the borders of his home community. It is the bridge that also facilitates his return home and provides him with the stance of hindsight and reflection he uses to describe what he sees. In this regard, he exists at the frontiers themselves—in the liminal or "in-between" space. In fact, writing itself is a bridge for B.G.R. In telling this story he has "betrayed" the order of the Martin Street Posse—he has, in a sense, transgressed their borders. And yet trespassing has made getting out possible.

The rhetorical aspects of B.G.R.'s essay are rich and often contradictory. He uses language to describe two very different rituals of belonging and two kinds of trespassing. The first is the ritual of being a gang member—the activities, the dangers, and what he sees as the lessons. The second, however, is his membership in a new and vastly different community—the college writing classroom. In *A Rhetoric of Motives*, Kenneth Burke uses the term "identification" to describe how members of a social group "promote social cohesion by acting rhetorically upon themselves and one another" (1325). In addition to the classical idea of persuasion, Burke argues that it is through identification that rhetors are able to establish likeness with their audience. Burke writes, "We are clearly in the region of rhetoric when considering the identifications whereby a specialized activity makes one a participant in some social or economic class" (1329). Belonging, therefore, is a rhetorical act.

While I'm interested in the ways in which B.G.R.'s essay is a multi- layered performance demonstrating his facility to be part of multiples communities and to shift between multiple codes of belonging, I'm also troubled by the sense that to be of one

world is to deny the other. Not only is B.G.R. writing about a liminal experience—where he is in-between—but the conditions of this essay themselves arise out of a condition of identity that Bhabha calls "hybridity." According to Bhabha, hybridity is a "fraught, anxious, and ambivalent condition. It is about how you survive, how you try to produce a sense of agency or identity in a situation in which you are continually having to deal with the symbols of power and identity" (cited in Matthews, 103). I have to wonder how the contours and tacit codes of the academic community delimit a whole new set of borders, a whole new "legitimate" space that students need to recognize and conform to in order to identify with the academy. For as Bruner reminds us, "[s]chool curricula and classroom "climates" always reflect inarticulate cultural values as well as explicit plans; and these values are never far removed from considerations of social class, gender, and the prerogatives of social power" (27). This is a complicated point, but it is worth considering how our very assignments may delimit parameters for our students about writing, about story-telling, and ultimately about what kinds of stories "count" and are acceptable within the academic discourse community.

Translating

In the essay "Island Princess" (1999), Walkiria Manzueta describes the culture shock she experienced moving from the Dominican Republic to the United States at the age of eleven. Sent by her parents to live with her aunt in New York, her essay examines the ways in which these two very different places and cultures have shaped her sense of identity. Here is how she begins her essay: "There once was a little girl who lived on an island full of life, pulsating with rhythm, steeped in culture. She was smart and outgoing.

The townspeople called her Dominican Princess" (35). Walkiria uses the familiar narrative structure of a fairy tale to write about the changes in home life, community, schooling, and, most importantly, language. With the classic invocation "there once was," readers recognize that to describe what "once was" is to describe what no longer is. The structure of the fairy tale rests on the assumption that there has been a reversal of fortune, a mismatch between expectations and outcome. It also, however, assures readers that there will be a resolution and a re-establishment of order.

In the first part of her essay, Walkiria follows the generic conventions of fairy tales by using the third person to describe her Dominican life:

> She was raised by her grandmother, "Mami," amid a large extended family of cousins, aunts, and uncles, in a big bright-green house with magenta trim. Her grandmother's face was wrinkled from experience and too much sun. The girl's daily chores included fetching water from a creek, *el posito*, at the foot of the mountain and cutting down the tree branches that her grandmother used to make brooms. When she went after the water, she carried two gallons in each hand and with a bundle of cloth made a flat surface on her head, *un rodillo*, on which she balanced another full bucket. Cutting the branches was a chance to get the *soga*, a long, strong string that hung from the tree. This became the jump rope for an afternoon game. She had to pull hard to free it. (35)

While Walkiria draws on the conventions of the fairy tale, she also plays with them by inverting the classic story of a maid who is transformed into a princess. Walkiria *begins* with the princess who is happily defined by hard work and extended family. She continues to describe her success with both school and friends:

> She was a good student, earning the respect of her teachers. The other children called her *la preferida*, teacher's pet, the center of attention. School life was simple. The children respected their teachers, seeing them as an untouchable authority, never talking back to them and recognizing that they had the final word. But recess was a time of play, as the girl led a crowd of screaming, eager friends to the nearby *bodega*. They used the five or ten cents their parents gave them to buy *quimalitos*, freezer pops, to quench their thirst. (36)

The opening of Walkiria's essay is built upon the foundations of family, school, and community. She describes a place that is safe and known, where there are clear parameters for behavior and where she can be an authority on certain matters (such as carrying water, jumping rope, and excelling in school). In all areas of her life, then—the island, home, and school—she establishes her sense of belonging.

After these opening paragraphs, however, the remainder of Walkiria's essay is written in the first person. She includes a structural break of white space, and when her narrative resumes she is flying into Logan airport in the middle of winter. The fairy tale is over, and her essay goes on to document how all her earlier ideas (and ideals) are thrown into disarray by her arrival in America:

> I moved into an attic apartment with dark carpets and an ugly brown-and-yellow floral tile floor in the kitchen, not the house with inside stairs I'd dreamed of...I had drug dealers for neighbors. One aunt and three cousins replaced the numerous relatives I had left behind. When I lived in the Dominican Republic, I compared the lights of New York to my island's stars. I imagined how I would walk through the alleys between brick buildings with clothes hanging above me, like the characters in *West Side Story*. To my surprise the stars were not countless and bright, they were few and dim. The alleys were dangerous and filled with No Trespassing signs. (36)

In this passage, Walkiria focuses on how three different spaces—her apartment, neighborhood, and universe—all are vastly different than what she had originally imagined. She describes a place where her neighbors

> were nothing but street bums, harassed me with demeaning comments, "Hey, Mamicula, ven aca!" "Hey pretty one, come over here!" Like *Little Red Riding Hood*, I walked past big bad wolves. My innocent vision of the United States, gotten from shows I'd watched on television in the Dominican Republic, especially *Plaza Sesamo* (Sesame Street), was one of kids from different backgrounds and races playing together in the streets. (37)

While *Sesame Street* may have shaped her ideas about neighborhood life in America, her experience is one that matches the predatory outline of another famous fairy tale. Her opening paragraphs include Spanish words that were familiar and well known to her on the island. By including the English translations, Walkiria establishes herself as an authority on a subject that she assumes her audience is not. However, in this passage even her language has been transformed from the realm of safety and family into frightening words from lecherous men. Ultimately, Walkiria describes her transformation from being a star student in the Dominican Republic to being placed in a remedial class: "I went from being a popular girl to being the new girl in class, the girl who knew less English than the rest, the girl to make fun of when she stumbled over the pronunciation of words" (37). By the end of her essay, Spanish has disappeared and English has established itself as the language of assimilation, material success, and higher education.

From *West Side Story* to *Sesame Street*, Walkiria's idea of America has been shaped by popular culture. Her own experiences, however, stand out in sharp contrast. Rather than rejecting popular culture, Walkiria embraces it as necessary tool for learning English. She describes watching *The Cosby Show* and how by studying the predicaments of Theo and Rudy she was able to learn the language that had so disrupted her idyllic world. By the end of her essay she has aligned herself with the American story of success and, like Richard Rodriguez's "scholarship boy," Walkiria details in rapid succession her "rise" as she graduates at the top of her eighth grade class and wins a scholarship to a private high school for girls.She writes, "I organized a clean -up committee, volunteered, participated. I became freshman class president. I was inducted into the National Honor Society. The island girl who not too long ago could not speak English was now tutoring

her classmates. St. Mary's was my door to other places" (38). Her essay, in other words, details not only learning to speak English, but how to belong in America.

References to popular culture operate as an important kind of shorthand for Walkiria. In naming particular shows, such as *West Side Story* and *The Cosby Show* she establishes herself as a certain kind of person belonging to certain communities with particular values. Interestingly enough each of these shows is also about assimilation and success in America. *The Cosby Show* portrayed a wealthy black family (as opposed to say, *The Jeffersons*) on mainstream television for certainly the first time in American history. However, it is a black family that has conformed to white middle-class values. In *Imagined Communities* Benedict Anderson argues that "nation-ness" is a kind of "cultural artifact" (4) and that a nation is "an imagined political community" distinguished by how it is collectively imagined (6). According to Anderson, books, television, and Broadway shows form "the cultural products of nationalism" and shape the ways in which nations are imagined. Language—both written and spoken—plays a dominant role in shaping the idea of a nation because it creates a sense of connection and continuity across history and time, what Anderson calls a "contemporaneous community." For example, singing the national anthem with other people—whether twenty years ago or twenty years from now—provides a sense of connection with other Americans in history and makes us feel "American." The cultural products, then, that Walkiria incorporates are not central to her story of dislocation and disillusionment, but rather play a crucial role in signaling her membership and sense of belonging *as an American.*

For this reason, it is particularly important to notice what the genre of the fairy tale provides Walkiria and how she uses it to give structure to her own experience. In *The Culture of Education* Jerome Bruner suggests that genre can exist as something that is in a text—such as its plot—but that genre also exists as a way of making sense of a text in that it offers some sort of "representation" of the world (135). Genres then, according to Bruner, are "culturally specialized ways of both envisaging and communicating about the human condition" (136). Walkiria's essay, for example, draws on the generic convention of the fairy tale to provide a sense of plot and structure to her narrative. It is a rhetorical tactic that signals certain conditions and recognitions in her readers—they will "know" this story because they "know" how fairy tales work. However, by using the fairy tale to order her experience, she also finds structure to understand and celebrate her experience as a "happy ending." Bruner writes:

> Narrative is a recounting of human plans gone off the track, expectations gone awry. It is a way to domesticate human error and mishap. It conventionalizes the common forms of human mishap into genres...Stories reassert a kind of conventional wisdom about what can be expected, even (or especially) what can be expected to go wrong and what might be done to restore or cope with the situation. ("Making" 31)

Being able to construct a self in narrative, according to Bruner is "crucial to constructing our lives and a "place" for ourselves in the possible world we will encounter" ("Making" 40). Narratives about self then, construct stories of possible selves and potential identities. In this sense, the act of translating is important in Walkiria's essay. The word "translate" can actually mean many things—to express something in another language, to explain something, to convert. In Latin, to translate literally means to "carry across." The translations that Walkiria includes in her essay explain the Spanish words for her readers, but they also serve to signal to her audience that these words are also now

"foreign" to her as well. She has succeeded in "carrying over" a new sense of self into this new language and new world. Where Spanish words first existed in the idyllic fairy tale world of the island, then later as the menacing threats from the men in her neighborhood, by the end of the essay they have vanished altogether. The Spanish words become the trace of her former self and life, embedded within the new language she has mastered.

Traveling

Marcus E. Howard's essay, "You Must be from Down South" (2001), explores his experience as a southerner attending college in the north. As a meditation on regionalism, Marcus considers his own preconceived ideas of what it means to be a southerner and what it means to be a northerner. He begins his essay with the line he often hears, "You must be from down South." He is seen as an exotic element in the north every time he speaks and often asked to describe what "life was like" where he grew up. In fact, he writes that for most of his life, he looked forward to leaving the south:

> Throughout much of my life I anticipated with an eagerness and desire, which time only perpetuated, the moment when I could throw off the label of a Southerner. I have not had traumatic experiences in my life, and I am also without a deep dark secret that threatens my identity. In fact, I had a decent childhood. But growing up I often questioned whether that label was impressed upon me by some sort of unearthly mistake. Or, that life had made a canny arrangement, debarring me of completeness. (11)

The language Marcus uses is formal in terms of diction and style ("Throughout much of my life I anticipated with an eagerness and desire"). In describing his sense of being a southerner, he writes: "I often felt as if I were trapped under a blanket. Protected too much by the traditionalism and conservatism of the region, to the point of smothering. It

was if a whole world was being hidden from my eyes, forcing me to experience only what it could cover" (11).

I read Marcus' narrative about his home as a form of a "travel narrative." Travel narratives describe encounters with other people (often foreign, exotic, other), as well as the experiences of being a foreigner (for a brief time) oneself. Traveling is about extending and redrawing one's sense of the world and enlarging the parameters of known spaces. But if traveling is about leaving one's place, it is also about the ability and comfort of being able to return. In other words, traveling is a temporary condition, one that implies a kind of privilege to be able to travel, as opposed to be being relocated or displaced.

After Marcus explores his own early desires to leave the south, the remainder of his essay considers the ideas he imagines northerners have about the south:

> I suspect that when most people think of the South, visions of a simple, unhurried, and genteel way of life come to mind. Old Dixie and its bygone days, where Southern belles in their big hoop dresses once lay around mansions bordered with rows of massive columns, under the protection of chivalrous masters of their plantations. Some people may think of the turbulent, violent, and divisive periods of our country's history. Played out on cotton, tobacco, and sugar plantations, blood soaked battlefields, the main streets of Birmingham, and back roads of Biloxie. [sic] Other lingering thoughts of the South may lead others to think of dilapidated houses and trailer parks with dirty-faced kids running barefoot along red clay roads somewhere in the backwoods. Those that have actually ventured down and crossed the Bible belt may be reminded of the beauty of Savannah, the stately mansions of Natchez, the proud towns where men with names like Washington, Jefferson, Madison, and Monroe were born, or the very growing skyline of Atlanta. (12)

In this passage Marcus' language is similar to that of a tour guide or an encyclopedia entry, complete with known export crops. It is a tour of the south by way of

architecture—plantations, streets, trailer parks, and mansions —as well as a list of the important architects of the nation, as the names of past presidents suggest.

There are four distinct movements in this passage—he begins with the image that he imagines "most people" have, reminiscent of *Gone With The Wind.* The next move is to the implied but unstated periods of slavery and Civil War which "some people" may think of. Next, he moves to the image of rural white poverty. And lastly, he references others who have traveled and seen the beauty of the region for themselves. There is a narrowing of subjects as he moves from *most*, to *some*, to *other,* until there is there is an absent subject in the sentence fragment, "Played out on cotton, tobacco, and sugar plantations, blood soaked battlefields, the main streets of Birmingham, and back roads of Biloxie." This omission of a subject stand out from the rest of the carefully composed essay. What gets "played out"? Slavery? Racism? It is the subject for which there is no name. As a writer, Marcus struggles with how to talk about what is on one hand unspeakable and, on the other hand, always everywhere understood. In other words, how does one write about the south and not write about slavery? (Then again, how does one write about the north and not write about slavery?) Later Marcus writes:

> After experiencing life from a Northerner's perspective and having my memories of the South awakened, I was perhaps inspired (or coerced), to examine the Southern life at a distance from the Mason-Dixon Line. There are characteristics of both the North and the South that I love. And there are qualities of both regions that might be better left unsaid. There have been times when certain characteristics of the South have served me as an anchor and kept me out of troubling situations. There have also been occasions when the South left me as helpless as it was after General Sherman's march. (13)

What Marcus has learned from the South, he goes on to write, is etiquette and politeness. He describes how he was taught to say "Yes, Ma'am" and "No, Sir." This cultural code

is reflected in his decision to leave unspoken the things that are "better left unsaid." This essay employs the rhetorical machinations of silence and evasion in order to tip-toe through the minefield of history without mentioning the role of race.

Marcus' parenthetical suggestion of "coercion" strikes me as an important moment in this piece. As a parenthetical, it is included as an extra, and yet its inclusion speaks to its importance. It reveals, I think a gap in the *ethos* that Marcus is establishing in that it throws some doubt and a bit of sarcasm onto his earlier reflective work in the essay. Marcus recognizes that he may be opening a space in this essay—but it is a space that he refuses to inhabit.

One of the key characteristics of Marcus' essay is the formal style and diction. The other is that Marcus writes more about a region than a specific place. In some ways, this might explain why his essay takes on a more distanced viewpoint. Lucy Lippard points out that "place" is most often looked at from the "subjective" viewpoint of an individual, while "region" has traditionally been more of "an objective geographic term" (33). Today, region is understood "not as a politically or geographically delimited place but one determined by stories, loyalties, group identity, common experiences and histories (often unrecorded), a state of mind rather than a place on a map" (34). Indeed, Marcus' essay reflects and builds upon certain cultural images and stories. However, what is left unsaid in this essay creates a rupture and reveals what I see as a kind of struggle between de Certeau's frontiers and bridges. For example, it is possible to see that the borderland or frontier between the legitimate and the alien exists at precisely this space of omission and silence. The bridge—as betrayal, as a way "out"—is a bridge that Marcus won't (can't) take because it is race itself. As a traveler, his return to the known

is guaranteed and in a sense reinforces the legitimacy of the territory while questioning the bridge. Like B.G.R., Marcus expresses a strong desire to get out of his home community. However, Marcus ends his essay by writing: "I also know that whatever heights I may reach in life, I will always carry a part of the South in my heart" (13). Social identity, as Bourdieu reminds us, is "defined and asserted through difference" (172). It is also established by identifying oneself with the stories of one's place of origin. Marcus, in this way is both a traveler *and* the establishment. He therefore has the privilege of traveling without trespassing and the privilege of a certain return without feeling displaced.

The Space of Narrative: Getting Into Trouble

Space and place help students construct narratives about home and identity. These are narratives that work and that construct selves that work. At this point I want to raise some questions about the structure of narrative itself—what it makes possible, what it restricts, and what it might limit. It seems to me that narrative *itself* is a place with its own tacit frontiers and bridges.

As evidenced by the student essays in this chapter, many student writers write about a liminal experience. However, the conditions of narrative require two important aspects: "trouble" and a "coda." Bruner reminds us that narratives are "typically born in trouble" (142). That is, narratives must have what Bruner calls "turning points" and Hayden White refers to as "happenings" (145). One of the key component of a successful narrative is that there is an event or experience that goes against the writer's expectations—that creates "trouble." The other aspect of narrative is the "coda" which

Bruner defines as "a retrospective evaluation of what it all might mean, a feature that also returns the hearer or reader from the there and then of the narrative to the here and now of the telling" (*Making* 20). A coda requires that the author acquires distance from the "trouble" in order to offer an interpretation of it.

These two characteristics of narrative—trouble and the coda—suggest that narratives are not hospitable to conditions of liminality. In other words, there needs to be trouble, but there also needs to be a resolution. This creates what can seem like an inherent tension for student writers whose self-narratives are often about conflicting or competing communities, identities, and places. However, narrative convention requires that writers find a place that is no longer one of "trouble" in order to write a coda. Writing self-narratives then also involves belonging—one has to know the structure of the common stories. Bruner writes, "It is our sense of belonging to this canonical past that allows us to frame our self-accounts as, somehow, impelled by deviation from what was expected of us, while still maintaining complicity with the canon" (147). In other words, in order for a narrative to be successful, the author must have tacit knowledge of the "canonical past" of narrative structures—about how stories work, and which ones can. This in fact may be why education and literacy commonly end up as the hero of the essay. The "rise-to-success" genre provides a structure to organize a self that renders it "readable" within the academic community.

Look for a moment at the introduction to *Race, Identity, and Representation.* Editors Cameron McCarthy and Warren Crichlow state that one of their goals in this collection is to "emphasize the fact that often minorities do not have central control over the production of images of themselves in this society...[they] do not have "equal access"

to the media to "tell their side of the story'" (xvii). While I strongly believe that personal narratives do provide this opportunity for all students, student narratives often reveal their recognition of the practices and modes of behaving, writing, and presenting a self—what Bourdieu describes as a "habitus"—that are most supported within the academic community. So while B.G.R. critiques the economic and social borders of American culture for black men, he ultimately makes education the hero of his narrative. Walkiria critiques the American dream, and yet sees herself as a product of it. Marcus critiques preconceived ideas of the south, yet identifies with many of them. In some ways then each of these narratives is part of the very structure they question. Their narratives reveal a rhetorical fluency to code-shift and align themselves both between, and part of, diverse communities that is not often acknowledged.

CHAPTER VI

THE ROLE OF SELF NARRATIVE IN EDUCATION

Education is *risky, for it fuels the sense of possibility.*

--Jerome Bruner, *The Culture of Education*

This project began as an investigation into the role of personal writing in composition studies because it seemed to me that the debate had taken an unproductive turn. While personal writing has been critiqued for celebrating an "authentic voice" (Bartholomae), maintaining a liberal humanist ideology of a unified, knowable self (Faigley), and reinforcing a capitalist hierarchy (France), the end result has often produced binary ways of thinking about both writers and writing. The pendulum has swung from a focus on the individual in the writing process movement, to the current position where discourse shapes everything, including the writer. Self and culture have been pitted against each other, as have personal writing and academic discourse. The dismissal of students' autobiographical writing has, however, foreclosed serious inquiry into the kinds of selves that students write and the specific role that the act of writing plays in making these stories of selves.

My primary purpose throughout this work has been to reexamine written self-representation as a rhetorical project. In doing so, I want to suggest a middle ground that exists between a transcendent notion of self most often associated with modernism and the purely discursive self most often associated with postmodernism. Rather than considering the possibilities and problematics of the self as an *entity*, as something that is

stable or fixed (either in its transcendent presence or its linguistic absence), my focus has been on the self as a *process* for which acts of self-narrative are crucial. The term "narrative identity" (Eakin) is used in autobiographical theory and provides composition studies a way to acknowledge both the lived experiences of material beings and the discursive work of making sense of these lived experiences.

At the same time that this study has looked at acts of writing a self, it has also been an extended argument for reading students' personal essays as complex cultural texts. Each chapter has brought together critical theory with student texts in order to demonstrate productive ways of reading student writing that reveals the narrative construction of identity. My goal throughout has been to suggest strategies for reading student writing not as a simple act of self-transcription, but a complex one of self-construction. Reading students' personal essay as projects of rhetorical self-representation repositions the debate from a philosophical one about the nature of self to a rhetorical one about the role of writing in shaping and construing the self. Implicit within this shift of focus is a careful attention to language use as a critical and creative act, and to the decisions made by a writer.

When students' autobiographical writing is read rhetorically, two important things can happen. First, rather than reading student texts for a sense of authentic self or voice, writing teachers can identify the narrative strategies students use to compose essays, and the ways, for instance, they establish *ethos*, assert agency, and move between conflicting social communities. Second, writing teachers can help students become more aware of the complex choices and decisions available for self-presentation. When autobiographical writing is seen as a series of writerly choices with specific effects, the work of revision

assumes a greater importance as student writers become increasingly aware of how, through writing, they construct and examine possible versions of a self.

In particular, I have read the essays in *Fresh Ink* for the ways in which student writers assert agency in their writing and the means by which they establish an *ethos* or the sense of a certain kind of person. Student writers are often viewed as novices struggling to "master" the language of the university. However, in Chapter 3 I have used Michel de Certeau's notion of "tactics" to look at the ways student writers become creative users and revisers of their cultural scripts of gender. For instance, Pete's essay about working on the farm with his father is an examination of the codes of masculine silence. In his articulation of them, however, Pete becomes a kind of border crosser who is able to inhabit and navigate the multiple realms of his home life. In Maura's essay "Being Barbie," she takes on the role of a creative deviant by illustrating her awareness of socially defined gender roles. Geraldine Charles becomes a "bricoleur" in her essay by bringing into dialogue popular magazines with personal experience in order to revise a dominant culture that celebrates whiteness. All of these texts demonstrate that student writers are highly aware of the ways that culture has shaped them—and aware that through writing they can write back and achieve discursive agency.

Writing about a family member is one of the most common subjects for student writers. While one of the charges against autobiographical writing is that of solipsism, the selves that students explore in these essays are actually highly relational. Psychoanalytic theorist Jessica Benjamin's theory of intersubjectivity provides a model for reading that emphasizes connection and "being with" (19) rather than distinction or separation. The essays in Chapter 4 examine how students construct a sense of self *by*

writing about an other. These essays revolve around difficult questions of family silences, absences, and losses. In each case, the writer uses writing to explore how a connection with a family member shapes how they see themselves, as both Elise and Mason do in writing about ailing grandparents. Writing also allows an opportunity to reframe a story, as K does in finally finding the words necessary to speak about his older brother's death from AIDS or Rebecca does by writing about her absent father.

In my reading of *Fresh Ink* I realized that the majority of student writers write from a liminal position. In other words, as students, they exist in what Homi Bhabha calls an "in-between" space—they are between the worlds of home and school, as well as between adolescence and adulthood. However, their essays revealed that even their notions of home and community were often, themselves, in transition suggesting the constant work of negotiation that student writers engage in as they move between communities, cultures, and languages. In Chapter 5 I used de Certeau's notion that all narratives involve the movement between "frontiers" and "bridges" to look at how ideas of belonging are established, maintained, and challenged. The trope of trespassing allowed me to read the ways in which B.G.R.'s essay "A Different Point of View," uses language to signal his multiple memberships in conflicting communities. In a similar way, Walkiria's use of Spanish and the generic conventions of the fairy tale enable her to describe two very different experiences of belonging. Lastly, I read Marcus' essay about growing up a southerner as a form of a travel narrative that seeks to affirm his connection with place.

The selves that students present and the stories they tell about identity, family, and home suggest that portraying a self on paper is never a simple proposition. Reading

these essays rhetorically highlights how the presentation of a certain kind of self requires a negotiation with different stories, communities, and cultural scripts. In *Making Stories: Law, Literature, Life*, Jerome Bruner argues that narrative "is a recounting of human plans gone off the track, expectations gone awry. It is a way to domesticate human error and mishap. It conventionalizes the common forms of human mishap into genres" (31). The view that student essays about family or home are clichéd or written by culture doesn't take into consideration the function of narrative to normalize and organize experience. In this sense, the structures of narrative—that something happens, that there is "trouble," but that this trouble is reflected on and resolved—creates knowable and safe parameters for student writers. The role of narrative then, is to create cultural ways of seeing one's self that are sanctioned and workable, that make sense to both writer and reader.

The Role of Narrative in Composition Studies

In *Narration as Knowledge: Tales of the Teaching Life,* Joseph Trimmer considers the ironic position of stories within the realm of English Studies. He notes that while most English teachers were drawn to the field out of a love for stories, part of becoming a professional was the realization that "[i]f we wanted to keep stories in our lives, we had to convert them into something else. Something more serious. Something more scientific" (x). Trimmer argues that this same suspicion of stories is reflected in the ways that many English teachers read and respond to student writing:

> But we did not read their stories as stories. We diagnosed them, marking the errors that excluded them from academic discourse. We told them that they could not use stories to report learning. That purpose was reserved for the privileged rhetorical forms—analysis and argument. We moved

> on, teaching them to write *about* stories, encouraging them to dissect plots and theorize themes. Such work, we said, would sharpen their analytical thinking, prepare them to challenge the claims of literary critics. (x)

Trimmer touches on three important assumptions about student writing that continue to hold sway in most academic institutions: 1) argument and analysis are privileged rhetorical forms over narrative and description; 2) students are often distanced from their own knowledge; 3) the dominant mode of reading student texts is to read for what a text isn't and for what a student hasn't accomplished.

The middle ground that I examine in this dissertation is one that recognizes the important cognitive and compositional work of argument and analysis. Through my reading of students' personal essays I have also tried to demonstrate that self-narratives do equally important cognitive and compositional work by emphasizing introspection, relationship, and reflection. In *The Essay: Theory and Pedagogy for an Active Form*, Paul Heilker argues that the dominant form of writing valued in the academy is what he terms the "thesis/support paper." Among the key characteristics of this form are the presentation of a thesis, the use of evidence, and an objective stance (4). However, as Heilker argues, the thesis/ support model of writing is actually a limited model for both writing and thinking in that it emphasizes a single perspective and focuses on truth as existing "out there" (5-6). While thesis/support papers are important, they encourage a singular way of reasoning at the expense of alternate ways of thinking.

In contrast to the thesis/support paper Heilker examines the different possibilities available in the genre of the essay. As a form of writing, the essay celebrates the process of discovery, a subjective stance, and the possibilities for changing one's mind. It is the essay—rather than the formulaic thesis/support papers—that most allows students the

"possibility of rhetorically reinventing themselves" (9). The essay raises questions rather than definitive answers, is a "manifestation of the spirit of discovery," and an "exploration of a world in flux" (17). Unlike thesis/support papers, the essay, writes Heilker,

> is not unlogical, but rather *differently* logical, not incoherent, but rather *differently* coherent. It develops its thoughts not according to the traditional criteria of classical, formal, subordinating logic, but rather according to the different but equally rigorous criteria of chrono-logic, the coordinating association of thoughts over time. Thus, the essay is not an easy or frivolous form to compose. (47)

The essay supports and encourages a different kind of thinking and writing that is as valuable and important as the traditional thesis/support paper. While Heilker is primarily concerned with rehabilitating the essay in general, his argument about the narrow range of writing supported and encouraged in the university is important for a re-examination of what counts as academic discourse. As T.R. Johnson writes in *A Rhetoric of Pleasure: Prose Style & Today's Composition Classroom*, "instead of organizing ourselves around a central, transcendent ideal of "academic discourse" as that which names, masters, and controls reality, we need to sensitize ourselves and our students to the openings, cracks and fissures in every discursive act" (13). In other words, a monolithic concept of academic discourse leaves little room for alternate ways of thinking and writing.

The thesis/support model of writing teaches students to synthesize information, make a claim, and support it with evidence. The essay also uses information and makes a claim, but an essay teaches students to consider multiple answers and to consider a variety of evidence, including personal experience. The essay stresses connected knowing over detached analysis. Each mode of writing, however, requires close reading, careful thinking, and acts of interpretation. Teaching both modes of writing would

provide student writers with a compositional fluency and enable them to become critically and creatively engaged readers and writers. To rethink the work of personal essays raises important questions about what kind of work students do, what forms of writing count, and what kind of knowledge matters. For instance, is it possible to expand the definition and understanding of academic writing in order to make room for narrative modes of knowing and thinking? While I do not want to question the importance of thesis/support writing, I join Heilker in making a case for other modes of writing and thinking that do different, but equally important work.

The Narrative Mode in Education

The question about the role and function of personal writing in composition studies is actually nested in a larger question about the role and function of writing in higher education. In *The Culture of Education*, Jerome Bruner argues that pedagogical methods reflect assumptions about students and learning. He outlines four dominant models of education that have contributed to our current educational practice. Where Bruner uses "children," I substitute "student" as a way of extending his analysis to the college curriculum.

The first model of education that Bruner outlines is one that sees students as "imitative learners" and involves the "acquisition of 'know-how." The primary pedagogical apparatus is the use of modeling, which as Bruner explains, is "the basis for apprenticeship, leading the novice into the skilled ways of the expert" (53). One of the underlying beliefs is that the less skilled can be taught by demonstration and that students can learn through imitation. However, another supporting belief is that competence is

only about talents, skills, and abilities, rather than about understanding and knowledge (54).

The second model views students as "learning from didactic exposure" and involves the "acquisition of propositional knowledge." Similar to Paolo Freire's conception of the "banking method" of education, this model assumes that the learner's mind is a "tabula rasa, a blank slate...a receptacle waiting to be filled" (56). It is also, as Bruner acknowledges, the "most widely adhered to line of folk pedagogy in practice today" (55). This is perhaps one of the dominant models for many college classrooms where the standard pedagogical practice is the lecture.

The third model views students as thinkers and involves the "development of intersubjective interchange" (56). Teachers understand that learners are constantly constructing "a model of the world to aid them in construing their experience." Discussion and collaboration are important tools for having learners share their knowledge with others. This "pedagogy of mutuality," writes Bruner, "presumes that all human minds are capable of holding beliefs and ideas which, through discussion and interaction, can be moved toward some shared frame of reference" (56). Knowledge, in this model, is "what is shared within discourse, within a 'textual' community" and is more concerned with "interpretation and understanding than with the achievement of factual knowledge or skilled performance" (57).

The fourth model sees students as knowledgeable and is "the management of 'objective' knowledge." This model holds that teaching should help learners "grasp the distinction between personal knowledge, on the one side, and 'what is taken to be known'

by the culture, on the other" (61). What is important in this model is the sense of continuity and history, but also the awareness that "all knowledge has a history" (61).

While Bruner is primarily concerned with schooling and with children, I would contend that many of these models hold sway within the institution of higher learning but in ways that are most often unarticulated. I would also argue that the kind of writing that is valued clearly reflects certain curricular assumptions about knowledge and knowers. Educators, in both lower and higher grades, necessarily use all four models at different times for different purposes. However, the bulk of education—even in college and universities—relies on the first two models of education, what Bruner calls "externalist theories" that emphasize the teacher as knower and the student as a passive learner. In contrast, Bruner's third and fourth models are examples of "internalist theories" that focus on what the student can do, what the student thinks they are doing, and "how learning can be premised on those intentional states" (63). It strikes me that while many of the stated curricular goals in higher education are "internalist" and claim to promote students who are critical thinkers, life-long learners, and responsible citizens, the actual practices of testing and paper writing in most college courses are "externalist." As Ann Berthoff reminds us, "When we begin with our students as *knowers*, we must include what happens "inside": "reality" is not something that happens to us from "outside"" (288).

In *The Courage to Teach*, educational theorist Parker Palmer would describe externalist theories of education as subscribing to the "objectivist myth of knowing" (100). This dominant educational model of knowledge is shaped like triangle, with the object of knowledge positioned at the top. Beneath the object is the "expert" whose task

it is to mediate and disseminate knowledge about the object to the throng of amateurs below that make up the bottom tier of the triangle. It is a top down model of knowing that rests on certain tacit assumptions about knowledge, knowers, and learning. The object under inquiry exists in a fixed position that is static and unchanging. The expert becomes the translator and sole authority on the object. The novices themselves are passive recipients whose only experience with the object of study is through the prescribed methods sanctioned by the expert.

In contrast to the "objectivist myth of knowing" is what Palmer calls the "community of truth." In this model, the object is referred to as a subject and exists at the center of a circle rather than at the highest point of a pyramid. Instead of the separation between expert and novice, there is a community of "knowers" who interact with each other, as well as with the subject. As a model of knowing, it is circular, interactive, and dynamic rather than linear, static, and hierarchical. Central to Palmer's view of knowledge is a critique of the predominance of binary thinking in education and the privileging of objectivity:

> In this culture, objective facts are regarded as pure, while subjective feelings are suspect and sullied. In this culture, the self is not a source to be tapped but a danger to be suppressed, not a potential to be fulfilled but an obstacle to be overcome. In this culture, the pathology of speech disconnected from self is regarded, and rewarded, as a virtue. (18)

Palmer calls this "either/or" thinking a kind of "thinking the world apart" (62). He asks "What would it look like to "think the world together," not to abandon discriminatory logic where it serves us well but to develop a more capacious habit of mind that supports the capacity for connectedness?" (62).

While Palmer is not speaking about writing per se, it is not a far reach to see how this view of knowledge is reflected in what currently constitutes academic discourse. There is, of course, a place for the binary logic of either/or thinking and for objective facts. However, there also needs to be room for a way to think of *both/and.* Personal essays can put into direct practice Bruner's internalist theories of education and embody the model of knowledge advocated by Palmer. Writing is the most direct and tangible way to make and sustain connections between students and subjects. And because autobiographical writing emphasizes the writer as an agent—a knower and a maker of knowledge—it creates the conditions for students to "think the world together."

"A system of education," writes Bruner, "must help those growing up in a culture find an identity within that culture. Without it, they stumble in their effort after meaning. It is only in the narrative mode that one can construct an identity and find a place in one's culture. Schools must cultivate it, nurture it, cease taking it for granted" (42). Writing the self is a complicated matter that exists at the intersections of what is private and what is public, what is narrative and what is analysis, what is textual and what is cultural. Self-narratives develop a critical awareness of self in relation to other possible selves, as well as an awareness of self in relation to the larger world. Within the realm of higher education, the personal essay has the potential to exist as a tool for investigating the space between subjective and objective knowledge, as well as between the personal and the academic. For this reason, personal essays could be an important way for students across the curriculum to seek connections between their own experiences and the subjects they encounter in the classroom.

Reading the student essays of *Fresh Ink* has provided me with a heightened awareness of the work that goes into a personal essay. As a form of writing, it encourages and makes space for the *work of writing itself* as writers try on stories of self and become active users of language. In an academic institution that often separates the knower from the subject and that privileges objective facts over subjective knowledge, the personal essay provides a necessary space for students to imagine themselves as writers and to compose a relationship between their lives and their education.

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